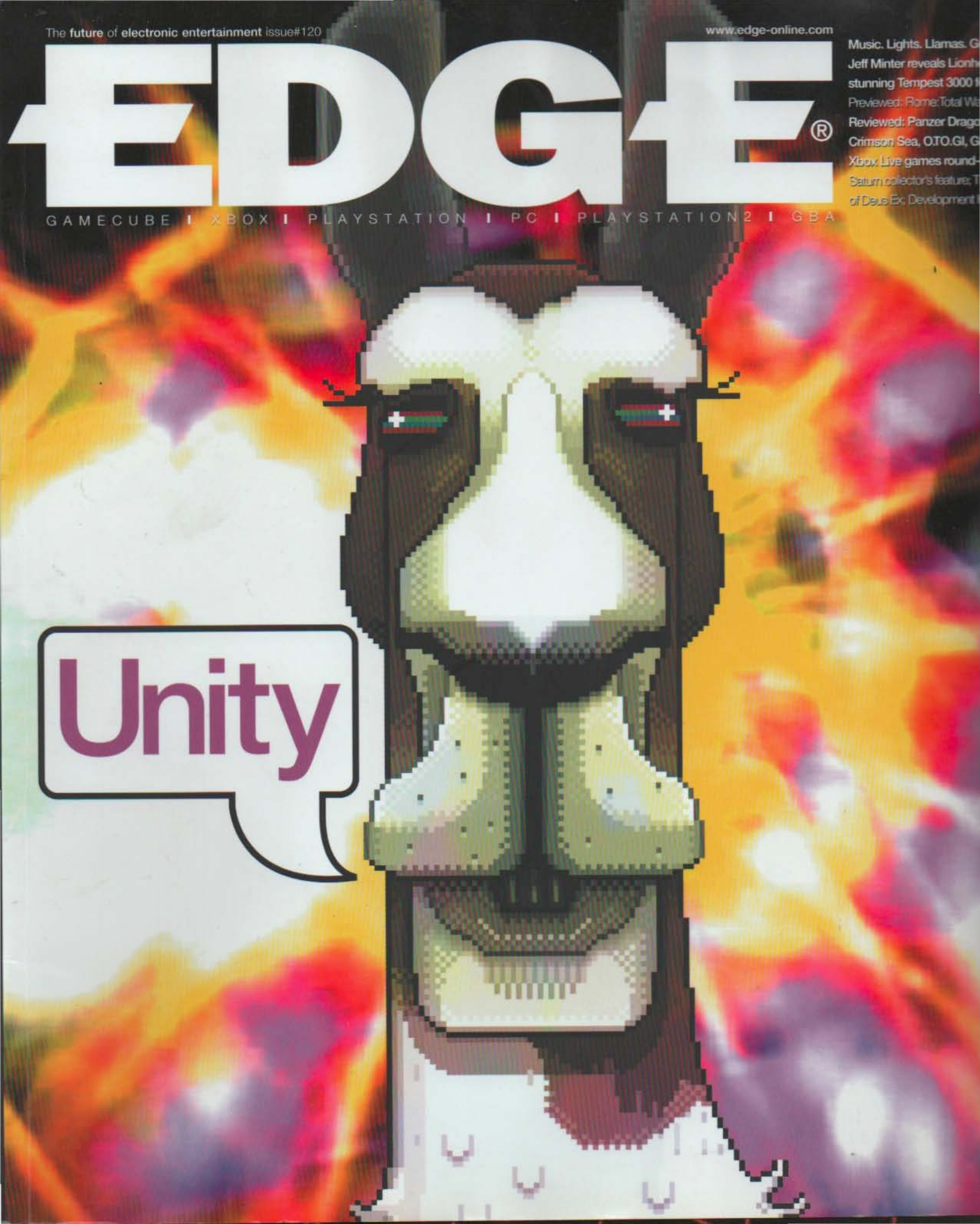
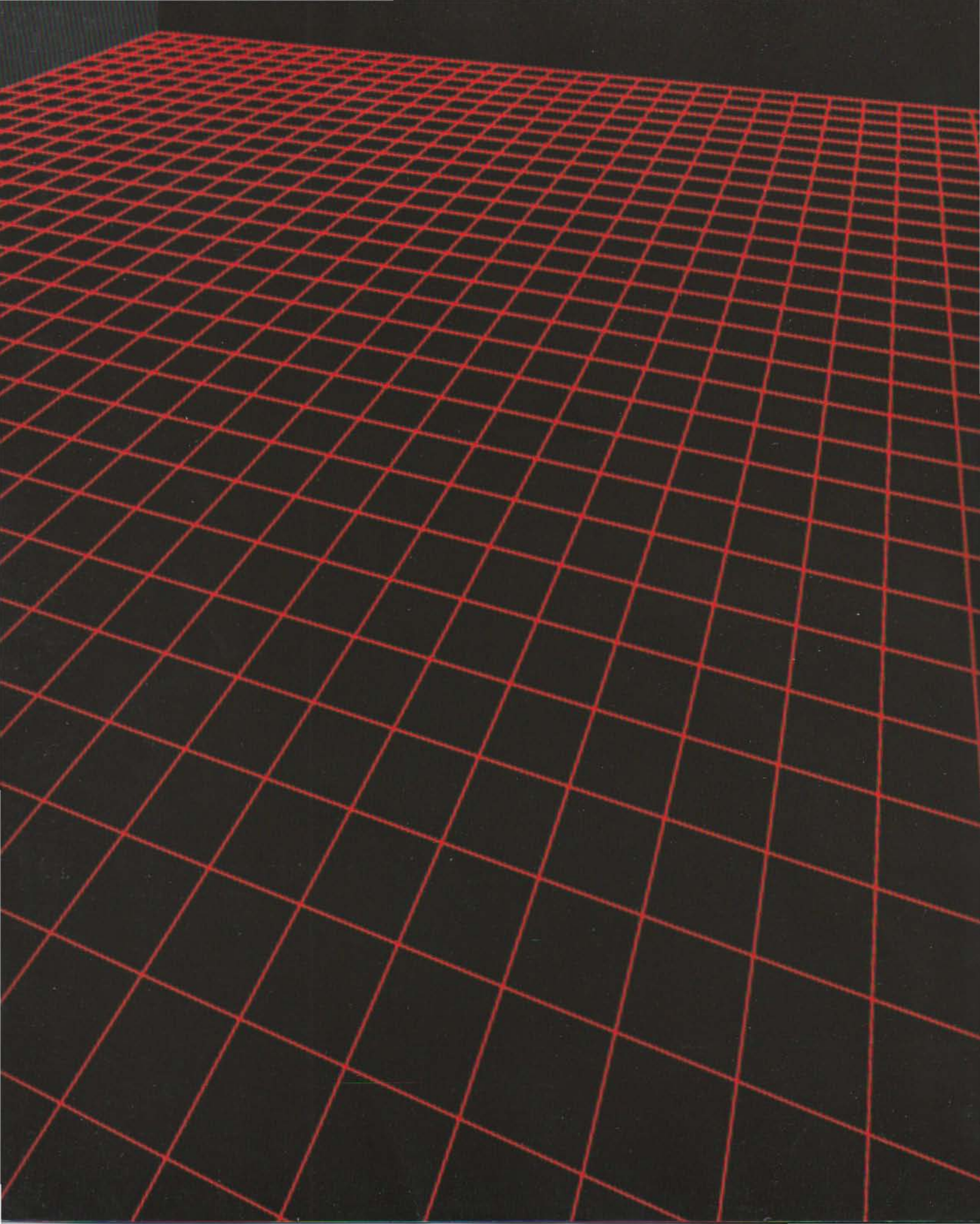
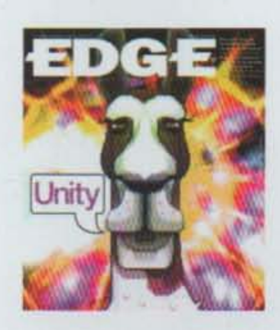


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Music. Lights. Llamas.
Jeff Minter reveals
stunning Tempest 3000
Previewed: Rome: Total
Reviewed: Panzer
Crimson Sea, O.TO.GI,
Xbox Live games
Saturn collector's feature;
of Deus Ex; Development
Unity





"I've got stuff in my head which I really, really want to do," said **Jeff Minter** back in **E**95 (February 2001). "I can see it running in my head, and there isn't quite enough power yet to do it, but there may well be fairly shortly… it's hard to explain, I'll have to do it."

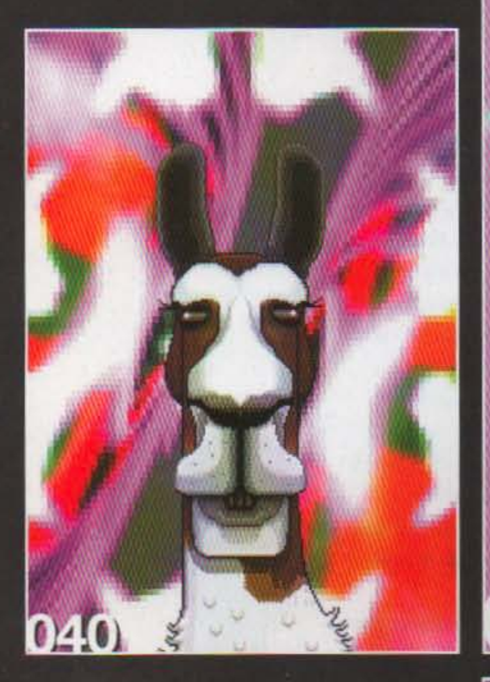
Well now he has. Or rather, he's started to. *Unity* is early (you can find out just how early by turning to p40) yet **Edge** makes no apology for supporting Minter so soon into his latest venture. More than perhaps any other developer in the UK, Minter embodies the very essence of bedroom coding. So much of what has been lost to the conglomeration of the videogame industry over the years has thankfully prevailed at Llamasoft: a one-man company whose development ethos has, remarkably, remained unchanged since its inception back in the early-'80s, its founder's passion for gaming as ardent now as ever despite numerous significant setbacks. In a world where money has replaced many gods, that says something about his character. And it's the very reason for **Edge**'s faith in the man.

Other than Minter's enthusiastic tinkering with the GameCube's architecture, it's been a typically colourless start to the year. Tales of excellent games lost in the absurd number of pre-Christmas releases, overlooked by a public caught up in its seasonal consumerist rush to the tills with *The Big Licence* in hand are depressingly familiar but, of course, expected. Last year's statistics may paint a picture as vibrant as this month's cover but as illustrated by our lead news story this month (p6), beneath the numbers the canvas looks bleak for many a developer in 2003.

One day this industry will realise that less is in fact more.



Features











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the 'music sounds better with ewe' issue



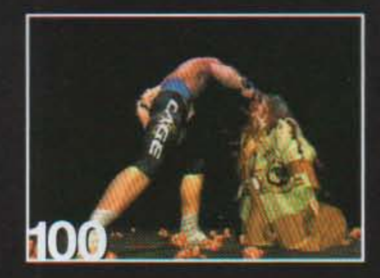






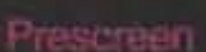












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Testscreen

Colin Morrison chief operating officer & MD, UK

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"You move like a pregnant yak."


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The State of Play Nation

2002 has broken sales records for videogames but the figures belie the parlous financial state of many publishers and developers. It's not a state of affairs that bodes well for 2003

The games industry loves to start the new year with good tidings and 2003 has proved no different. Ever since the painful transition of 1994/5, the market has grown steadily, and 2002 has been claimed as a bumper crop. The combined revenues of the top 20 games companies for the 2002 financial year was $24.5bn (£15.3bn), up 35 per cent on the previous 12 months. Meanwhile, in the US, the combined total of hardware and software retail sales topped $10bn (£6.2bn) for the first time, while the respective size of the UK market, the third biggest console market after the US and Japan, is now more than £2bn.

Other big figures came courtesy of Sony, which has pushed the global installed base of PlayStation2 past the 48m mark in three short years, and Take 2, whose *GTAIII* sold 7m units, a total the fastest-selling sequel *GTA: Vice City* seems certain to match during 2003. There was even some reasonable news for Nintendo and Microsoft – the installed bases of their consoles have steadily accumulated to around the 8m and 6m marks respectively.

So with all this money sloshing around, these should be times of plenty for retailers, publishers and developers alike. Unfortunately, however, a closer examination of the facts reveals a rather different state of affairs: 2002 has been a bad year for most companies. A string of publishers including high flyers such as Sega and THQ have downgraded their earning predictions in the face of increased competition. The world's second biggest thirdparty publisher, Activision, also lowered its financial figures for 2003 by 12 per cent citing weaker than expected performance of key brands such as *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*, which accounted for 44 per cent of its revenue in FY2002. In addition, it claimed earnings were hit by lower than expected sales for Xbox and GameCube software and moves by US retailers to reduce the amount of stock they preorder.

This malaise is aptly demonstrated by the financial performance of publicly-owned publishers and developers: of all the floated US and European companies, only one, Take 2, saw its share price rise during 2002. Even EA, that bastion of efficiency and financial probity suffered a 10 per cent fall, while the likes of Ubi Soft and Midway were down 70-odd per cent, and Infogrames' value was hit a whopping 86 per cent. The financial markets are still suffering from the structural imbalances of the technology bubble and wider issues such as accounting irregularities, of course, but this shouldn't have such a negative effect on an industry experiencing headline growth.

The impact has been particularly felt by the weaker companies such as Acclaim, 3DO, Bam! Entertainment and Rage, which have had to push through large-scale redundancies and perform extensive corporate restructuring during 2002. The Japanese market, which used to be the most profitable sector of the games industry, also remains highly problematic, with the Tokyo stockmarket hitting a 20-year low in 2002. Retail sales in Japan continue to contract after years of recession and deflation causing problems for publishers such as Capcom, Square and Sega. Closer to home, the trickle-down effect of such woes have seen UK development studios such as Runecraft, Software Creations and Crawfish go bust. And one thing's certain, more will follow in 2003.

"Of all the floated US and European companies, only one, Take 2, saw its share price rise during 2002. Even EA suffered a 10 per cent fall"





One of the crucial problems for publishers is the amount of games available, particularly for PlayStation2. The current glut means that only a small proportion of releases make money



State of: French market

It's been a very bad year for French games companies. Not only have the big publishers such as Infogrames and Ubi Soft suffered heavily because of the debts built up during their previous years of acquisition but even smaller companies such as Cryo, which went bust, and Microids have suffered from the collapse of confidence in the sector. The knock-on effects have caused the closure of many independent French developers which relied on deals with these publishers. Another disaster was the corporate malaise of the huge multinational Vivendi Universal group, which includes the Franco-American publisher Vivendi Universal Games. Suffering huge debt, the parent company expects to offload the games publisher, which includes Blizzard and Valve in its portfolio, on the Nasdaq in 2003.



State of: UK market

While there has been little to cheer about for publicly-quoted UK games companies, publishers Eidos and SCi have at least reduced their debts and are now in much better shape than previously. Times have been much harder for developers such as Argonaut and Warthog however. Argonaut, in particular, has suffered from a failure to sign games such as *Carve* and *Orchid* to publishers, as well as delays to the release of *Malice*.

State of: US market

The importance of the US software market is clear for western publishers and developers. Not only does it account for half of publishers revenues, but around 75 per cent of profits too. This is why the success of *Grand Theft Auto* has been so important for Take 2 as well as being so detrimental to its competitors. Take 2 was the only company to see its share price rise during 2002. THQ, Acclaim, Midway and to a lesser extent Activision were hit heavily by the relative failure of their key brands in the face of the *GTA* onslaught.





Publisher Acclaim didn't have a good 2002. Not only did *Turok: Evolution* fail to perform as expected but another hyped game, *Vexx*, was delayed into 2003

One of the chief problems is that, despite the booming retail market, the risks associated with game development and publishing are rising faster. Put bluntly, there are too many games chasing too few gamers. Figures from the Banc of America, for example, suggest that compared to the 270 games available for PlayStation2, Xbox and GameCube in 2001, 2002 saw a three-fold increase to 750 titles.

"A glut of PlayStation2 product has hammered developers for most of 2002 while slower than anticipated penetration of Xbox has made life difficult for both developers and publishers," claims **Jeremy Furniss**, head of the games team at corporate investment boutique Tenon Livingstone Guarantee.

The effect has been concentrated as PlayStation2 owners are buying fewer games in comparison with previous PlayStation owners. The average number of games per PlayStation2, called the tie-ratio, was 5.5 in September 2002, according to Sony. The comparable figure at a similar point in PlayStation's hardware cycle was over seven games per console (see Tie ratio graph, p10).

The result is competition is becoming increasingly cut-throat, particularly for the triple-A games, the multi-million sellers, which every publisher relies on for the bulk of their profits. EA's control of the big Christmas film licences, 'The Lord of the Rings' and 'Harry Potter', has all but sucked dry the lucrative December sales period for the competition. Equally the 8m-plus sales of the *Grand Theft Auto* franchise in 2002 has scooped up a large chunk of the remaining massmarket. Amazingly, according to market research company NPD, Take 2 was the second largest console publisher in the US in FY2002, taking 9.5 per cent of the total market and a massive 16 per cent of the PS2 market.

"The worrying thing is that according to this cyclical thinking, 2002 and 2003 should be the fat years where publishers save some cash"

One outcome has been that other companies have suffered from large number of high-profile and costly turkeys such as *Turok*, *Stuntman* and Sega Sports' *NFL2K3*, which have cost their respective publishers, Acclaim, Infogrames and Sega dear.

"We are operating in a very large market in which less and less titles dominate most of the sales," points out **Geoff Brown**, CEO of UK development group Kaboom! Studios, which



With over 48m PS2s shipped globally, Sony expects to further expand the demographic of its console with massmarket games such as the London-developed *EyeToy* game, due for release in spring 2003







High-profile games such as *GTA: Vice City* and *The Getaway* are proving to be massively profitable for their publishers thanks to the growth in the games market but the increased competition is causing financial misery for smaller publishers



itself has suffered layoffs during 2002. "It takes over £2m to develop a game and when a publisher adds the cost of manufacture, marketing and distribution it could cost anything up to £10m to launch a product. Any failure costs the developer and the publisher a considerable amount."

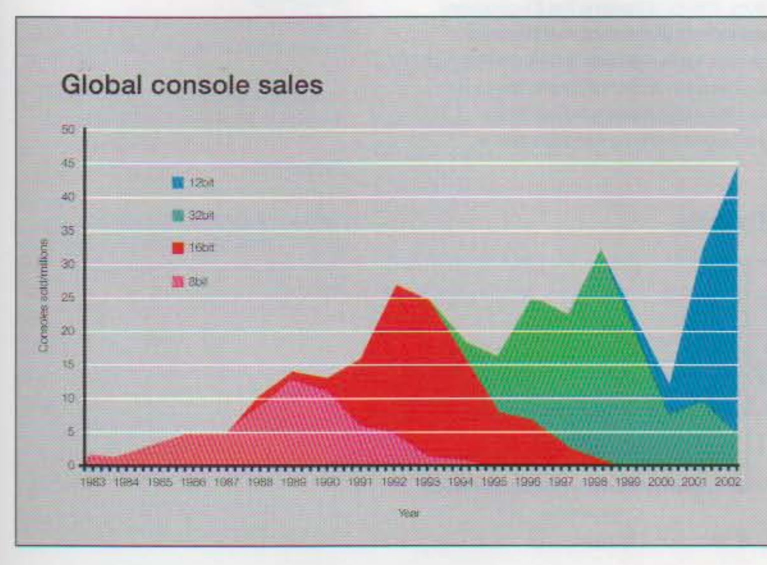
The increased cost of developing games compared to the previous generation of software is another underlying issue. Analysts estimate that while the average cost of developing a game has doubled, sales are only up 50 per cent. In order to make up this shortfall, publishers are releasing their games on as many platforms as possible. This is turn creates problems for retailers, who don't have enough shelfspace to stock a PS2, Xbox and GC version of each title and are nervous about being lumbered with large amounts of unwanted games. They are, therefore, focusing on few big-selling titles, which further marginalises the smaller publishers.

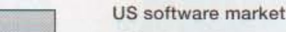
Catch the wave

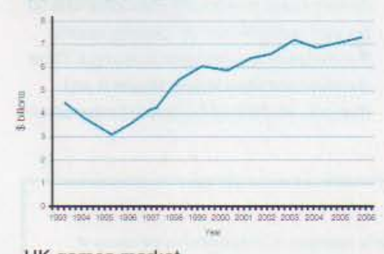
Of course, the game industry has always suffered from ups and downs (see Global console sales graph below). Hardware is launched at a high price with little software – margins are tight and publishers make huge losses as they gear up their studios to develop games for the new systems. A couple of years later though, hardware sales peak, premier-priced software flies off the shelves and publishers expect to make huge profits and congratulate themselves on their business acumen. Twenty-four months down the line, hardware is given away with pizza, software volumes remain high but overall value drops as the percentage of budget purchases increases. Publishers tighten their belts and prepare to hit the next financial brickwall.

The worrying thing is that according to this cyclical thinking, 2002 and 2003 should be the fat years where publishers save some cash to provide for the next round of lean years. It's widely assumed that Microsoft will attempt to launch its new hardware before Sony, forcing a 2004 launch date for Xbox2, with PlayStation3 following in 2005. Analysts predict this will cause a seven per cent drop in the US software market in 2004, with recovery back to the market's 2003 peak delayed until 2006.

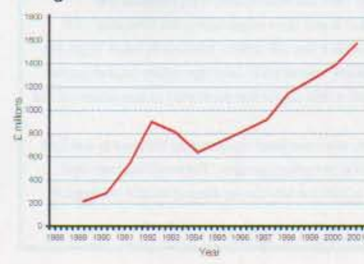
But if publishers aren't making money in 2002/3, there's a high likelihood they won't make it through to the next earnings peak. This is why 2003 is expected to herald







UK games market



Cheap at half the price: developers bought out in 2002

Company: Rare
Snapped up by: Microsoft for $375m (£233m)
Working on: *Kameo* and the *Perfect Dark* sequel among others

Company: Angel Studios
Snapped up by: Take 2 for $28m (£17m) in cash and 235,679 shares
Working on: *Midnight Club II*, *Red Dead Revolver* and two unannounced titles

Company: Barking Dog
Snapped up by: Take 2 for $3m (£1.9m) and 242,450-odd shares
Working on: an unnamed military sim and another unannounced game

Company: Shiny
Snapped up by: Infogrames for $47m (£29m)
Working on: *Enter the Matrix*

Company: Gray Matter
Snapped up by: Activision for 133,609 shares (60 per cent of company)
Working on: *Wolfenstein* franchise

Company: Luxoflux
Snapped up by: Activision (price undisclosed)
Working on: *True Crime: Streets of LA* and *Shrek*

Company: Shaba Games
Snapped up by: Activision for 258,621 shares
Working on: *Shaun Murray's Pro Wakeboarder*

Company: Massive Entertainment
Snapped up by: Vivendi Universal Games (price undisclosed)
Working on: *Ground Control* and *AquaNox* franchises

Company: Incog
Snapped up by: Sony Computer Entertainment America (price undisclosed)
Working on: *War of the Monsters* and *Twisted Metal* franchise

Company: Particle Systems
Snapped up by: Argonaut for £2.4m and 3.5m shares
Working on: *Exo* and *I-War* franchise



EA continues to protect its number one thirdparty publisher status with the success of lucrative film licences such as *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*, which has massively outperformed Vivendi Universal's book-licensed game



Losers of 2002

Company: Cryo
What happened: Only three years the 250-strong French publisher was worth over £450m but its failure to break out of its domestic market combined with huge losses from its Cryonetworks online division and its inability to develop even half-decent games saw the company shut down with large debts during the summer.

Company: Software Creations
What happened: With a monthly wage bill of £350,000, the veteran Manchester-based conversion and work-for-hire house couldn't maintain positive cashflow despite its relationship with the likes of top publishers such as EA, THQ and Nintendo.

Company: Runecraft
What happened: At the height of its power, UK-studio Runecraft had offices in Leeds, Glasgow, Taunton and Dewsbury as well as a CG studio in Birmingham. Despite the success of games such as the iTV version of *Tetris* on Sky's GameStar portal, for which it owned the rights, and an attempted restructuring of its debts, the studio closed down at the end of 2002 following the last-minute cancellation of a title for the BBC.

Company: Bam! Entertainment
What happened: The US publisher floated on the US Nasdaq exchange at the end of 2001, boasting strategic relationships with film production companies which would provide cheap access to top-quality licences. The relative failure of games such as *Driven* and *Reign of Fire* saw the company suffered a $8m (£5m) first quarter loss, however, and forced the sale of its internal development studio as well as the cancellation of several projects previously signed with UK developers.

Company: Interplay
What happened: Crippled by debts, Interplay had to sell its crown jewel, Dave Perry's Shiny studio and the licence to games based on the 'Matrix' films. 2002 also saw the acrimonious departure of founder and CEO Brian Fargo, who finally fell out with French parent company Titus, and the company's delisting from the Nasdaq SmallCap market due to it not meeting certain minimum listing requirements.



Pictured collecting one of the many awards won during 2002, some of the Rockstar North team behind *GTAIII* will be reprising their performance in 2003, thanks to the success of *GTA: Vice City*



even more mergers, acquisitions and restructuring than 2002.

Companies currently rumoured to be up for sale include Midway and Capcom, while Square fulfilled long-term rumours about its future by merging with fellow Japanese RPG-specialist Enix. Other companies vulnerable to take-over bids due to low share prices include Acclaim, Interplay, Infogrames and Ubi Soft. Similarly Eidos' rockbottom share price rose 50 per cent during November following reports that Activision was interested in buying it. Other perceived predators include Microsoft and Nintendo, who should be looking to strengthen internal development teams to ensure their next-generation hardware is well supported by high-quality launch software. Microsoft, in particular, has been linked with pretty much every publisher suffering difficulties during 2002.

Meanwhile, the only company that can afford to watch the corporate bloodbath of 2003 with a degree of aloofness is, of course, Sony. There's no question that it's completely dominated the opposition over the past 12 months, leaving Nintendo and Microsoft to fight for the scraps of joint third place. Maybe that was the cryptic meaning behind Sony's trademark advertising campaign after all.

Winners of 2002

Company: Take 2
Reasons to be cheerful: 8m sales of *GTA* franchise. It started the year with its shares suspended because of financial irregularities and a lawsuit by shareholders but ended 2002 pushing Activision hard for second largest thirdparty publisher status.

Company: Sony
Reasons to be cheerful: 48m PlayStation2s. Outselling the combined efforts of the opposition two to one, Sony has won this battle of the console war. Game over until 2004.

Company: Electronic Arts
Reasons to be cheerful: Still number one. EA's continued status as the bellweather game industry company was underlined by its status as one of the Nasdaq 100 companies and the success of *Harry Potter*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *FIFA 2003* and *Medal of Honor* games.

Company: Rare
Reasons to be cheerful: $375m (£233m). Rare's status provided grit for the rumour mill for nine months of 2002. The only surprise about Microsoft's acquisition of the UK-studio was the high price it paid for its services.

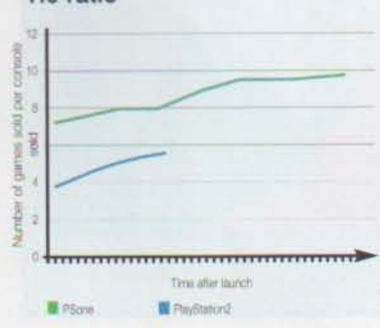
Company: SCi
Reasons to be cheerful: £2.2m profit for FY2002. After several years of appalling financial figures, UK-publisher SCi finally turns a corner thanks to the success of *The Italian Job* and *Conflict: Desert Storm*.

State of: Developers

Perhaps the metaphor for the problems currently experienced by developers is demonstrated by the closure of US-studio Presto. Based in San Diego, the studio was formed in 1991 and was recently responsible for the development of high-profile games such as the million-selling *Myst III* and Xbox online launch title *Whacked!* CEO **Michel Kripalani** claimed his decision to shut down his studio, while it was still solvent, followed its failure to get the development rights for future *Myst* games combined with publishers' reluctance to fund high-quality original games. "We were at the point where we had so many expenses and such a high payroll that we started to lose passion in the games," he told local paper, the 'Union Tribune'.

Similar stories could be told by most independent developers, who have been squeezed by the need to self-fund games, publishers' tardiness in signing new games and the decline of royalty payments. The result has been that many developers have taken the publishers' dollar and chosen to become fully-owned internal studios, not least for the sake of their staff's financial security.

Tie ratio



Edge talks to some of the industry's luminaries

1 What do you think has been the most significant event in 2002?

2 Are you surprised about the parlous state of many developers and publishers at this stage in the current hardware cycle?

3 What are you most looking forward to in 2003?

4 Do you expect the downturn for the next hardware cycle transition to have the impact that the past one has done?

5 What do you think will be the most important development in 2003?

Glen O'Connell, director of communications, Rage

1 It's undoubtedly the year of PlayStation2 again. It's gone from strength to strength.

2 Costs are still rising yet there are too many people doing the wrong sorts of things. The games-buying public are being ever more selective on titles they buy – whether that be truly innovative games or those that you spend £10m telling them about – and those companies that react to that quickest will be the ones to survive in the long term.

3 Xbox continuing to increase its overall market share, the successful introduction of their Xbox Live service to see whether online gaming is really all its cracked up to be, Nintendo taking more interest in Europe generally and Sony continuing to do what it does best.

4 Yes, most likely, particularly for the publicly listed companies. But the most important thing is managing the downturn by getting as much cash in the bank as possible before committing all your resources to PS3 and Xbox2. A few more people will also be shaken out, but if you're big and strong or mean and lean today then you can certainly have a place in this business.

5 The major factor for publishers will be to manage the software pricing downturn that may come during the year, while 2003 is also the year when online gaming either starts to catch people's imagination or falls flat.

Adrian Pilkington, head of games, Sky

1 The launch of GameCube – a brave move, but for TV gaming it was the launch of *Tomb Raider* on Sky Gamestar which takes TV gaming to a different place and the launch of the first TV games controller – the Sky Gamepad.

2 Yes, size really counts if you are a publisher, thankfully there are exceptions, but there's an inevitability about consolidation in both markets. Our developers for TV games, Denki, Mindseye and Visionik, have had a good year.

3 *Zelda* on GameCube and *Quake III*. For TV games there are so many opportunities, more multiplayer games, increased game sophistication, more links with top publishers and the first game to use the video decoder.

4 Now there are three hardware players the effect may not be quite as strong as it was before the launch of PlayStation2. I'd expect some careful choice of titles before the end of the hardware cycle to keep game sales moving.

5 For consoles, online gaming, but haven't we been saying this for years? For TV gaming, multiplayer games, with the launch of Sky Gamepad and peer-to-peer gaming across different households.

Ian Baverstock, business developer manager, Kuju

1 It has to be the launches of Xbox and GameCube.

2 I'm not surprised as I think the writing has been on the wall for some time. The current state of those companies is the result of the problems many encountered during the early part of the platform transition now feeding through to the bottom of the food chain. Publishers who can't afford hits and developers without the capability to make hits will find the going increasingly tough as budgets for all aspects of development and publishing continue to rise.

3 From a business point of view, I'm looking forward to the widespread ownership of Java mobile phones. This should be a big market by the end of 2003 and one with a lot of opportunities for new ideas.

4 I think the impact will be worse. The development and marketing budgets will continue to climb but next time around there will also be a big element of online gaming and content delivery which will further stretch everyone involved.

5 The online multiplayer developments on consoles. This could revolutionise the games and the business of making games in one go.

Glenn Corpes, co-director, Lost Toys

1 For me it was the release of *Ico*, a thing of wondrous, minimalist beauty and the first story-based game I've finished, or even cared about, in years.

2 Not really, this round was bound to be worse because publishers are even more conservative when it comes to taking risks with original games than they were at this point in the last cycle.

3 Atari finally releasing *Battle Engine Aquila*.

4 It won't be quite as bad as Sony's machine won't be so old and its dominance will be less complete than last time round. It should be slightly less painful for games to switch platforms mid-project as they will be far less likely to be built around a hardcore, machine-specific engine.

5 Multiplayer will finally start making sense to the mainstream. Xbox Live's streamlining of the whole matchmaking process is very neat. Sony may well have to do something similar.

Juan Montes, VP and director of technology and content solutions, Motorola

1 The launch of Atari arcade classic games on colour phones in the UK.

2 Not all, it was expected. The impact of higher value productions will see developers working in a more structured way with recognition for different specialist roles, some of which will be brought in just as needed as with films. High costs of production will impact the number of original games commissioned by publishers and those with a strong catalogue of brands will dominate the market.

3 More vibrant mobile games environment plus some real innovative developments in console online games.

4 Yes, as the difference between current generation and next generation will become less and less from the consumer point of view unless there starts to be a wide adoption of online games and all made easier by next-gen machines.

5 Location-aware massively online games where players from PC, console and mobiles can interact with each other within the game and establish exchanges of messages and chat in parallel.

Shahid Ahmad, managing director, START! games

1 The sales phenomenon of *GTA: Vice City*.

2 It's not the hardware cycle that is causing problems. The market has been saturated for some time: too much product, much of it mediocre, there was bound to be fallout. It happens in every business sector, why should ours be immune?

3 The release of START! games first funded project. And less selfishly, the emergence of new structures in our sector that promote and reward creativity and efficiency.

4 I expect it to be much worse. Each successive cycle brings fewer compelling reasons for the consumer to upgrade. Of course, a lot of publishers and developers will have fallen by the wayside by then, which will lead to even less creativity and further stagnation.

5 The Sony/Telewest broadband platform. If anything has the potential to change the nature of gaming, including content, delivery and costing, this has got to be it.

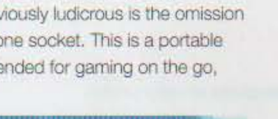
March launch for GBA SP in Europe

Flip screen, front light, lithium battery: Hate to say Edge told you so…

Significant GBA releases	
Super Monkey Ball Jr.	March
Sonic Advance 2	March
Phantasy Star Chronicles	March
TLoZ: A Link to the Past	March 28
GT Advance 3	Q1
Kirby	Q2
Golden Sun 2	Q3
Advance Wars 2	Q3
Super Mario Advance 4	Q4

Nintendo of Europe's press conferences have long been extravagant affairs, but those attending the January 9 gathering expecting choral hallelujahs went home disappointed. Those desiring something more substantial announcement didn't – although regular **Edge** readers won't have been as surprised as most. March 28 will see the launch of the Game Boy Advance SP, a compact front-lit version of the market-leading (but oft-criticised) handheld.

The design is similar to the concept sketches revealed in **E**118, a Game & Watch style flip screen being the machine's defining feature. The system weighs 143g, and, when folded, measures 82mm by 84.6mm and is 24.3mm deep, making it the first Game Boy system to fit comfortably in users' pockets. The rechargeable lithium battery is another feature predicted by **Edge**, although the internal architecture of the platform will be absolutely identical to the standard GBA, and the addition of another two face buttons remains a pipe dream for Super Famicom evangelists. Both the current face buttons and the D-pad are flatter than before, but only long-term testing will reveal if they prove more comfortable. Similar judgement is reserved for the R and L buttons, which are much smaller and lie on the back corners of the machine.



More obviously ludicrous is the omission of a headphone socket. This is a portable machine, intended for gaming on the go, and the decision to leave a headphone socket out is incomprehensible – at least for those disregarding the financial possibilities. A cable plugging into the 'EXT 2' socket (the same socket that the system is charged through) acts as a converter, but it is an optional extra, and must be purchased separately. It's another revenue stream for sure, but **Edge** can't help but think it's a shame that it has to come at the expense of the sleek, all-in-one nature of the device.

While the most significant change for gamers is the front light (which can be switched on or off, and provides fractionally washed out illumination that'll be familar to all users of Triton Labs' Afterburner kit), the major revolution as far as the industry is concerned could well be in the aesthetics.

"This is a portable machine, intended for gaming on the go, and the decision to leave a headphone socket out is incomprehensible"









Advance Wars 2 **threatens to ruin lives when it invades Europe in the third quarter of 2003. On the SP all games can look this bright (right) but battery life is cut from 18 to 10 hours**

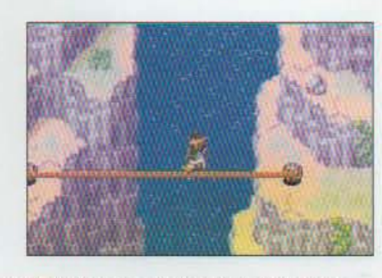


The silver version in particular could easily be mistake for a Discman or PDA, and Nintendo's positioning of the SP as 'aspirational' hardware appears to indicate a desire to draw older gamers to the platform. David Gosen, Nintendo of Europe's Head of Marketing, was typically agreeable when pushed on this in the post-press conference Q&A session, citing *Tomb Raider* as an indication of the company's adult intentions.

The rest of the announcement, as well as providing another opportunity for Gosen to do what he does best – conjure up lucid images of Nintendo domination from meaningless statistics – revealed the company's software line-up for 2003. The GameCube firstparty line-up is strong: *Metroid Prime*'s will hit Europe on March 21; *The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker* gets its release on May 3; Treasure's *Wario World* appears in June; and *F-Zero*, *Mario Golf*, *1080 Avalanche*, *Pikmin 2* and *Mario Kart* will all, inevitable slippage disregarded, see a European release sometime late in 2003.

The highlight of the Game Boy Advance release schedule is certainly the sequel to *Advance Wars*, due out in Q3 – the same time at which Pocket Monsters trainers will get their next fix, with *Pokémon Sapphire* and *Pokémon Ruby*.





***Golden Sun 2*, one of the highlights of this year's GBA releases and sequel to last year's hugely popular portable title should be in your local shop in translated form in the autumn**







A headphone plug-in is available through a dedicated jack adaptor cable (above, centre) while recharging requires the user to be near an electrical outlet – not particularly handy if you're on a plane



CUTTINGS



Ikaruga world ranking competition open

The release of the GameCube version of *Ikaruga* in Japan this month has seen the start of the game's Net Ranking system to find the world's best player of Treasure's delightful shoot 'em up. Competitors are initially ranked according to country (Japan's winner will be announced in March) with the world championship taking place in July in order to make proceedings fairer for western players as the title isn't expected here until April. Visit www.ikaruga-atari.net

Square/Enix merger hits obstacle

As **Edge** goes to press, news has emerged that the recently announced Square/Enix merger, reported last issue, has hit a hitch. A news report in Japanese newspaper, 'Nihon Nihon Keizai Shimbun', has indicated that Square's founder and major shareholder isn't happy with the deals of the merger. Masafumi Miyamoto is apparently unhappy with the number of shares in the new entity that holders of Square shares will receive and consequently plans to vote against the merger. Consequently the two companies have agreed to alter the terms of the deal.

Warthog acquires ZedTwo

Manchester-based independent developer, Zed Two Game Design Studio, has been acquired by Warthog. The company was founded in 1996 by Ste and John Pickford, two industry veterans with an impressive 30 years of development experience and some major titles between them – most recently *Wetrix* and *AquaAqua*. The company is currently working on *Pillage* (**E**111) and *Sticky Balls* (**E**113). Zed Two joins Warthog's studios in southern Sweden and Cheadle, bringing the company's workforce to 230.

Videogame industry gets together for Christmas

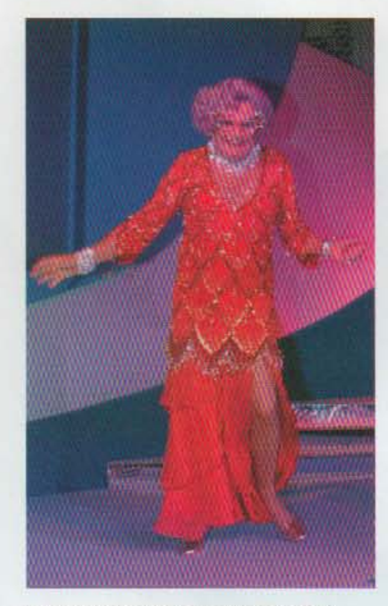
Industry shindig raises money for charity and is rounded off by distinguished antipodean dame

The UK videogame industry demonstrated its Christmas cheer by meeting up for the annual Industry Dinner (InDin) in December, in a bid to raise money for the entertainment software charity (esc). Taking place at the Savoy Hotel in London, the event saw over 300 industry luminaries gather to raise funds for the industry charity, set up to help underprivileged youngsters in 2000. Newsreader Martin Lewis was on hand to explain the aims and achievements of the organisation, while Acclaim's **Rod Cousens**, also the chairman of the esc and founder of InDin, was on hand to compere the event.

But it wasn't just about charity. The evening also saw a performance by 'angle grinder performance artist' Rosie the Voodoo Princess, and was crowned with a performance from Dame Edna Everage, and there was the usual amount of carousing and networking. The real meat of the evening night, though, was industry veteran Nick Alexander's witty review of the year (which did little to dispel the myth that this is a male-dominated industry), and the handing out of the InDin Awards. Chief among these was the Industry Achievement Award, which went to Stuart Dinsey of trade publication, 'MCV', while **Edge** itself was the recipient of the Consumer Magazine of the Year award.

Cousens was certainly pleased with the success of the event, "The InDin was once again a great success, bringing together the industry leaders and giving them an opportunity to socialise but also raise money for a good cause. We hope everyone enjoyed the night and look forward to a successful event next year."





InDin founder and Acclaim COO, Rod Cousens (left). Not to be confused with Dame Edna Everage (above)

InDin Winners

The winners of the InDin awards in full were as follows:

Industry Achievement Award:
Stuart Dinsey, 'MCV'
Consumer Magazine of the Year:
Edge
Handheld Game of the Year:
Sonic Advance
Developer of the Year:
Rockstar North
Hardware Vendor of the Year:
Sony
PC Game of the Year:
Medal of Honor: Allied Assault
Console Game of the Year:
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City
Software Vendor of the Year:
Take 2
Independent Retailer of the Year:
Software Store and for achievement of the year, GameStation
Multiple Retailer of the Year:
GAME
Distributor of the Year:
Centresoft



Manufacturers prepare for next round in console war

Key technology partnerships prompt escalation of rumours regarding next iteration of console technology



The next console war has already started, and the rumours proliferate

Although official news is thin on the ground, the race is clearly hotting up for the domination of the next round of the console war. While Microsoft is widely expected to try to steal a march on Sony when it introduces the next iteration of Xbox hardware (widely reported to be called Xbox Next and realistically expected some time in 2005), recent developments demonstrate that both Sony and Nintendo are also gearing up for the next round of home console technology. Both companies are reportedly putting partnerships in place to support their own future hardware.

Rumours also contend that this year's E3 will see repackaged versions of the current roster of console hardware. It's been rumoured that Microsoft has been working on an integrated Xbox chipset for some time (see Front End, **E**113), but there is also speculation that Sony, too, is working on a cheaper variant. More extreme rumours suggest that a portable GameCube may even be in the works, and though this sounds unlikely given the recent announcement concerning the Game Boy Advance SP, a low-cost, more portable version of the console is apparently on the cards before the end of the year.

Although there continues to be some supposition that Nintendo may be ready to emulate Sega and pull out of the home console hardware competition, a recent report on Bloomberg suggests that the company may be in talks with chip-maker NEC regarding the processor for a possible successor to the GameCube. Sony meanwhile has announced that, together with Toshiba, it has licensed two high-speed memory interfaces from Rambus Technologies; 'Yellowstone', a memory to microprocessor connection, and 'Redwood', a chip-to-chip connection.

"Rambus is and will be the key player in the ultra high-speed interface technology," explained SCE's **Ken Kutaragi** in a statement. "This enables us to create a wide range of applications and platforms, from high-end systems to digital consumer-electronics products within Sony." But while he was keen to emphasise the general application of the technology, it's clear that the superfast data transfer that Yellowstone and Redwood offer will support the sort of blisteringly fast calculations that the Cell chip, under development by Sony, IBM and Toshiba and anticipated to power PlayStation3, will be capable of.

E3 opportunity for UK developers

British Council-sponsored pavilion offers UK videogame companies the chance to visit this year's E3 in Los Angeles





UK: State of Play looks set to banish memories of half-hearted UK pavilions thanks to the DTi and the British Council

UK publishers and developers will be given the opportunity to go to this year's E3 Expo courtesy of the government sponsored 'UK: State of Play' pavilion. Endorsed by both UK trade associations, ELSPA and TIGA, the pavilion is the result of a collaboration between the Department of Trade and Industry and the British Council. It's intended to offer publishers and developers the facilities to pursue business as well as acting as a general shop window for UK talent at this year's E3, which will take place once again at The Los Angeles Convention Center in May.

Significantly, the booth won't be relegated to the purgatory of Kentia Hall as these things usually are, but will instead be occupying some prime real estate, situated, as it is, next to the Sony and Sega stands in West Hall. The 2,500 square foot stand is to be designed by Studio Myerscough, and will be able to hold up to 60 companies, providing them with the meeting rooms and informal areas to conduct all the networking and business meetings that they will need. It's also set to return to the show in subsequent years.

The move marks a growing recognition by the government of the significant cultural and economic contribution made by the videogame industry. It follows a number of other government measures to support UK developers and publishers – such as the recent DTI report, 'From exuberant youth to sustainable maturity' and the British Council trade mission to Japan, of which **Edge** was a part.

In order to qualify for a space at the pavilion, companies need to show that developing or publishing games software is their core business. They also need to be registered in the UK, intending to do business at E3, and financially viable. For more information or to apply for a place on the pavilion contact Sanja Morris at The British Council (email sanja.morris@britishcouncil.org or telephone 020 7389 3036) or download a State of Play application form from www.creativexport.co.uk.

Recently Reviewed

Edge brings you a rundown of last issue's review scores

Title	Platform	Publisher	Developer	Score
Metroid Prime	GC	Nintendo	Retro Studios	9
Metroid Fusion	GBA	Nintendo	In-house	8
Battle Engine Aquila	Xbox, PS2	Infogrames	Lost Toys	7
Dead to Rights	Xbox	Electronic Arts	Namco	7
Kingdom Hearts	PS2	Square	Square/Disney	7
Metal Slug 4	Neo-Geo	Sun Amusement	Mega Enterprise	7
Rage of the Dragons	Neo-Geo	Playmore	Evoga	7
Resident Evil 0	GC	Capcom	In-house	7
Rygar: The Legendary Adventure	PS2	Tecmo	In-house	7
Shinobi	PS2	Sega	Overworks	7
Big Mutha Truckers	PS2, Xbox	Empire Interactive	Eutechnyx	6
Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance	Xbox	Konami	In-house	6
Mini Moni Shakkato Tambourine	PS	Sega	Sonic Team	6
Sly Raccoon	PS2	SCEE	Sucker Punch	6
The Getaway	PS2	SCEE	In-house (London Studio)	6
Contra Advance: The Alien Wars EX	GBA	Konami	In-house	5
Unreal Championship	Xbox	Infogrames	Digital Extremes/Epic Games	5
Defender	PS2	Midway	In-house	3
Star Wars Bounty Hunter	PS2, GC	Activision	LucasArts	2



Metroid Prime



Metroid Fusion



Shinobi



Kingdom Hearts

CUTTINGS



The Getaway causes controversy

SCEE received a dose of good cheer this Christmas with news that *The Getaway* quickly stormed to chart success, becoming the second fastest selling game of all time (in a seven-day period). Nevertheless, it was soon ousted by Take 2's *GTA: Vice City* which returned to the top spot in subsequent weeks, and bad news emerged in the shape of a complaint from British Telecom about the depiction of one of its engineers. Sony has agreed to alter the offending sequences in forthcoming versions of the game.

Codemasters recruitment site

In a commendable move, UK publisher Codemasters has launched a series of career guides on its Website. The guides are aimed at those at a school or college level interested in pursuing a career in the videogame industry, focusing on graphics, programming and QA positions. They offer a variety of practical advice ranging from Web links to programming resources to the role of concept artists. For more information visit the company's Website at www.codemasters.com/jobs/careers

Gamehotel conference

New media design agency, TNC Network is launching a series of events and conferences dedicated to discussing the cultural relevance of videogames. Called Gamehotel – Games & Digital Pop Culture, the first event takes place in Paris on January 30, and will be dedicated to wireless and rhythm action gaming. Guests will include Tetsuya Mizuguchi, the creator of *Rez*, NanaOn-Sha's Kiri Matsuura, and **Edge** columnist Steven Poole among other guests. Visit www.gamehotel.net for booking information for the event, which will take place at the Centre Culturel Suisse de Paris in the Hotel Poussepin.

www.relic.com/rdn

Doing it for yourself

User-generated content is crucial to having a hit PC title according to developer Relic, which is why it's set up the Relic Developers' Network for its game Impossible Creatures





The Relic Developers' Network provide tools, tutorials and plenty of advice for all of Relic's games including older titles such as *Homeworld*. One of the crucial areas of the RDN is the forum, which allows the experience of Relic's development teams to filter down to those out to create their own versions

Ever since the phenomenal success of *Half-Life* mod *Counter-Strike*, PC developers have been acutely aware of the importance of allowing players to create their own levels, characters and scenarios. Not only does the approach massively prolong the shelf life of the original game – *Half-Life* was released back in 1998 but when it and its mods are taken into account it's still the most-played PC game – but it allows developers to regularly ship additional mission packs, which are relatively cheap to develop.

Developers such as Gas Powered Games and Bioware are both ensuring the longevity of their 2002 releases, *Dungeon Siege* and *Neverwinter Nights* respectively by making editing tools available to their communities as well as hosting user-designed content on their Websites. Canadian studio Relic has gone one stage further however with its just released (in US) RTS title *Impossible Creatures*. Not content with releasing a set of tools allowing users to make their own game mods, it's set up the Relic Developers' Network.

Structured around a Website full of downloads, tutorials and forums, the RDN also underpins the commercial realities of game development. Members are signed up on what Relic calls a Level 1 basis, which provides access to all editing tools and message boards. Those mods which demonstrate potential will be invited to Level 2 status, which entitles them to limited support from Relic's development team, while Level 3 status will see Relic co-develop the mod to the point of retail release.

"In the PC space it's becoming increasingly necessary to develop games that are almost entertainment operating systems rather than standalone products," explains **Ron Moravek**, Relic's chief operating officer. Appropriately Relic's publishing partner for *Impossible Creatures* is Microsoft, which makes the operating system metaphor even more apt. "For PC games to be successful they need to be expandable and extensible to enable the community to create their own content," Moravek continues. "This is great for both the users themselves and the developers. It creates a ton of new content while keeping the franchise alive for longer."



Relic itself first realised the importance of opening up its games following the release of its debut, *Homeworld*. Despite being a critical and commercial success, many hardcore gamers complained it was extremely difficult to modify. This wasn't surprising as it hadn't been designed in such as manner. No matter, the hardcore just reverse-engineered it. The result was over 20 versions including 'Star Trek', 'Star Wars', 'Babylon 5' and 'Battlestar Galactica' mods. "When *Homeworld* was complete we saw a huge surge in the community creating mods. We knew right away what we would do in all of our future products," says Moravek. *Homeworld* modding is now supported through RDN.

Clearly there are downsides to embracing such openness though. "In order for the tools to be as good as they are, we needed to implement a lot of additional features and usability upgrades," Moravek concedes. "It increased both the cost and time for making the product." Although not massively delayed, *Impossible Creatures*' release date did slip six months for example.

But even prior to the game's release, the RDN boasted around 2,300 downloads of its editing tools and 900 active members, a number that is certain to grow in the coming months. "Realistically we're hoping for 20–30 mods in the first six months after launch," Moravek muses. "Imagine if *GTAIII* had new missions coming out quarterly? Yikes! I would never come to work..."





The retail version of *Impossible Creatures* puts players in a 1920s-era environment where they have to build mutant armies of creatures such as lobster sharks and fish cheetahs to save the world. It should provide the mod community with plenty of ammunition

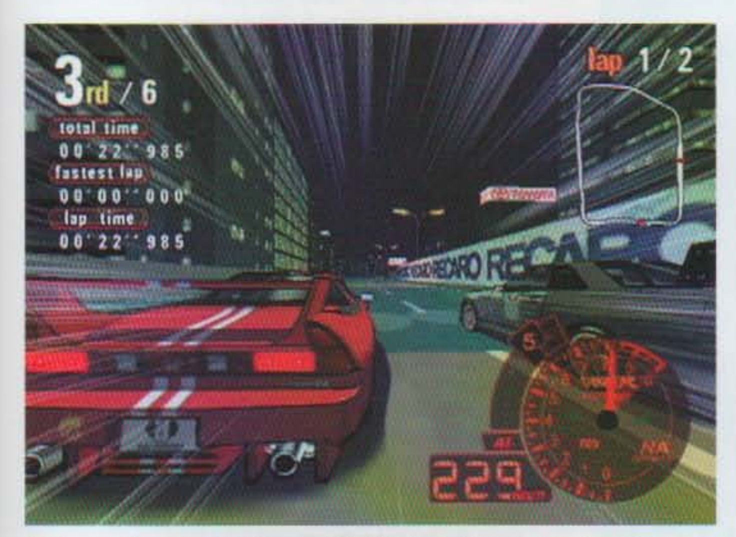
Tools of the trade

Weighing in at a whopping 145Mb, Relic's *Impossible Creatures*' Tool Installer isn't one for modders without a broadband connection but at least it does contain all the tools required to start creating mods. Components include a mission editor to create maps and place objects and triggers in environments; an FX editor to create creature attacks and structure animations; an object editor to edit objects and an exporter to convert 3ds max objects into the .sgm format used by *Impossible Creatures*. Object creation itself is handled by Discreet's gmax 3D content creation package – itself a separate 24Mb download.

www.sega.com/snap

The virtual return of Sega

It's not in the hardware business anymore, but Sega.com is back in the US, hosting online games for PlayStation2 and GameCube



The first non-Sega game to use Sega.com's SNAP online technology will be Capcom's cel-shaded racer *Auto Modellista*, which is scheduled for release in March in the US

While not the resurrection of Sega as a console manufacturer, the emergence of Sega.com as a player in the online gaming space is the next best thing for the company. Resulting from the need for an online infrastructure to support Dreamcast, the US-run Sega.com was always a more autonomous operation than Sega Europe's online division, which was set up in conjunction with BT. That was shut down following Sega's reinvention as a thirdparty publisher, but in the US, Sega.com survived, continuing as a general Internet service provider, as well as hosting Sega's online Dreamcast and PC games via its SegaNet service.

Now, with the rush of console vendors towards online gaming, Sega.com's experience as a prime mover is starting to pay dividends. It has the technical experience to get online games up and running as well as the network and servers to host games. The first publisher to sign up for its services is Capcom, which will launch the PS2 online service for *Auto Modellista* using Sega.com's Sega Network Application Package (SNAP). Due to be released in March, *Auto Modellista* allows players to race against up to eight other drivers online.

"Having shipped more than 17 networked console games to date, Sega is the undisputed pioneer in online console gaming. Sega.com helped make it possible by creating and supporting the technology backbone," says **Ryoichi Shiratsuchi**, CEO of Sega.com and Sega's general manager of network business. Most of Sega's current and upcoming online console games use SNAP including *Alien Front Online*, *Out Trigger*, *Bomberman Online* and the *Sega Sports* titles.

"From building the first high-speed online console gaming network to offering Nintendo GameCube and PlayStation2 developers a solution for implementing a network gaming environment with SNAP, Sega.com is truly committed to the future of the videogame industry – online gaming," Shiratsuchi continued.



Although Sega Europe's online division was closed after Sega became a thirdparty publisher, Sega.com has thrived in the US





This market should be particularly lucrative as the business model for PlayStation2 and GameCube online gaming is non-proprietary, allowing publishers to set up their own online infrastructure or buy in services from other companies. Sega.com has signed middleware deals with both hardware manufacturers. Microsoft, on the other hand, forces publishers to use its own hosting services for online Xbox games.

"Keeping in line with our open approach to the market, we welcome Sega.com's decision to offer technology and network services for online gaming," says **Andrew House**, executive vice president, Sony Computer Entertainment America. "As one of the core benefits of the PlayStation2 online model is to allow companies to take advantage of existing knowledge, investment and efficiencies, Sega.com will be able to help accelerate online game development with the release of its middleware solution, SNAP."

Jim Merrick, former director of network marketing at Nintendo of America agrees, "Offering a flexible and reliable network solution, SNAP allows our developers to focus on creating great games without worrying about the challenges of maintaining a network gaming environment."

Snap to it

There are two basic components to SNAP. The first is a software development kit (SDK), which enables developers to provide online functionality within their games. The second part is the actual hosting of games. This includes access to a fast network backbone to ensure low-latency gaming combined with intergame communications services as well as community building tools. Cheating is combated by a secure user authentication, which also links to the system's billing mechanism. Reporting technologies enable ladders, tournaments, rankings and other stats-based activities that are crucial to cultivating a game's online community.

In addition to SNAP's core communications, authentication and reporting technologies, game developers and publishers can benefit from an array of optional services, providing a full network solution. SNAP services are designed to assist with the operation, maintenance, and development of a network game environment, including server hosting, billing, consulting, and quality assurance testing. With SNAP hosting, game developers and publishers can take advantage of more than 100 scalable servers already installed across the US.



Most online Dreamcast titles released in the US, such as *Out Trigger*, *Alien Front Online* and *Bomberman Online*, relied on SNAP technology. Sega has also used SNAP to host its current online PlayStation2 games, particularly *Sega Sports* games, such as the popular *NFL2K3*

OUT THERE

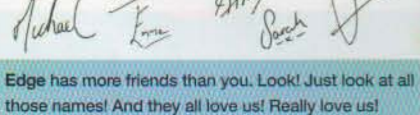
REPORTAGE





High on life: Minter and his merry men relax after four hours of pure *VLM-3* induced euphoria





Edge has more friends than you. Look! Just look at all those names! And they all love us! Really love us!







Lionhead's card, winner of second place in the Edge Christmas card competition. Congratulations

01 Yak to the Future

UK: "I've been to the year 3000 – not much has changed, but they lived under water," sing pure pop heroes Busted. Hold up, you hasty youngsters – **Edge** thinks you might have been fooled by Warp Records' subaquatic Winter London Rave on December 20, 2002, where Jeff Minter and three friends put on an atomic-grade lightshow. The four-hour display was controlled from the dancefloor, powered by wireless controllers and an early version of *VLM-3*, "the world's first simultaneous four-user interactive lightsynth." Onlookers were said to be "enthralled" and "LOVING IT!" and, oddly, "Louis Theroux." So no, it wasn't the year 3000, but, sure, it seemed like The Future at the time. And Minter? Well, **Edge** doesn't know how you could mistake him for your great, great, great, great granddaughter, but yeah, he's pretty fine.

02 Card sharps

UK: A bigup to Bite PR who sent us quite the most – would 'ghastly' be too cruel? – card this year. Okay, bling bling parodies are a bit 2001, but oh, the effort it must've taken. Well worth reprinting here. Our favourite, however, was Namco's cartoon Heihachi Santa surrounded by members of his *Tekken* family. Credit, too, to Lionhead's cute and understated missive – though Peter's signature didn't appear inside, so no eBay profit from that, then. And in third place: a piece of empty white paper, two crayons and a list of instructions. Not particularly festive, but Red Lorry Yellow Lorry PR's greeting was inventive and unusual. Thanks to everyone who cheered us up during our hideous Christmas deadline.

Soundbytes

"It's like a cross between Marx and Nietzsche, with added Hun-hate and a bit of Susannah Constantine and Trinny Woodall (the turpitude of the tight clothes wearer)."
The 'Guardian's Zoe Williams assesses the state of videogaming, in an article called 'Unfair Play'. **Edge** holds its breath; expects the worst.

"Well, I never thought I'd be putting a computer game on the cover of 'Sleaze'. But then, I never thought computer games would get to the point where they'd be of interest to me."
Steve Slocombe, editor of 'Sleaze Nation', on putting *GTA: Vice City* on the cover of his magazine.

"What is happening on the field and what is happening in the videogames is different right now"
Mark Holtzman, the NFL's senior vice president of consumer products, announces that the NFL will be reviewing its contract with the videogame industry following concerns that over-the-top hits in games could lead to on-pitch brutality in real life.

"These are young men at an impressionable age, lacking maturity and boundaries"
Assistant commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Tarique Ghaffur explains why rap music and shoot 'em up videogames causes kids to kill

Miyamoto porn

Japan: Presumably in an attempt at shedding his company's kiddy image, Miyamoto-san has been educating the readers of 'Weekly Playboy' (not seemingly part of Hefner's empire) magazine about the merits of the latest *Zelda* and forthcoming *Pikmin 2* games. While in the newsagents **Edge** felt it wise to consult other publications and, attracted by a great article on Subaru's Impreza WRX STi, it came across biweekly erotic publication 'Sabra' only to notice Mario's creator again happily smiling from within the pages, seemingly unperturbed by the filth surrounding him. Obviously keen to keep on top of further revelations, subscriptions to both mags have since been sorted.

Bikini overkill

Japan: Glance right, and meet *Sexy Beach*, Japanese hentai specialists Illusion's latest work and arguably the most canny release of 2002. Appearing just before Christmas, and a month before *Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball*, *Sexy Beach* offers similar thrills to Tecmo's title – the sun-drenched beach, the bikinis, the realistic flesh physics and the gratuitous posing – but boldly dispenses entirely with the whole volleyball pretence. **Edge**'s sandy seduction hasn't extended past the limits of the downloadable demo, which lets you apply tanning oil to the virtual girl's physique, but expects that the finished version will not require a nude patch. *Sexy Beach* is only available if you're in Japan; more information at www.illusion.co.jp

Marble madness

US: They say that the best games often appear late on in a console's life, as coders adjust to the machine's architecture. If that's true then *Marble Craze* might well be – get this, hyperbole fans – the best game ever, following its release late last year for the Atari 2600. Skip back 20 years, and imagine if Nagoshi-san was more interested in Atari than Drambuie. Paul Slocum's work is *Super Monkey Ball* made retro, requiring the player to guide a ball through 18 increasingly precarious mazes using two paddles, one for the vertical movement and one for the horizontal. **Edge** expects a new PDP-1 release in for review any day now. More info on Paul's Atari Projects page at http://qotile.net

Data Stream

November's US sales of *Mortal Kombat*:	**345,000**
November's US combined sales of *Dr. Muto*, *Defender* and *Haven: Call of the King*:	**21,000**
Midway's estimated current value:	**$204m (£127m)**
Amount one **Edge** fan has paid for issue zero of the publication:	**£500**
Year the popular Website Friends Reunited was launched:	**2000**
Number of staff employed at Friends Reunited:	**10**
Estimated amount Friends Reunited is expected to sell for this year:	**£25m**
Number of years of archived work, including valuable tomes on the subject of AI, destroyed in a fire at Edinburgh's School of Informatics:	**40**
Number of Xbox Live starter kits sold in America since the service launched in November 2002:	**250,000**
EA titles in the UK all formats top 20 during the month of December:	**6**
Sales clocked up by EA in the UK during December 2002:	**£75m**
Sales clocked up by its closest competitor, Take 2, during the same month:	**£27m**





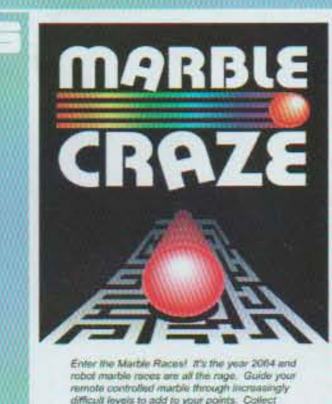


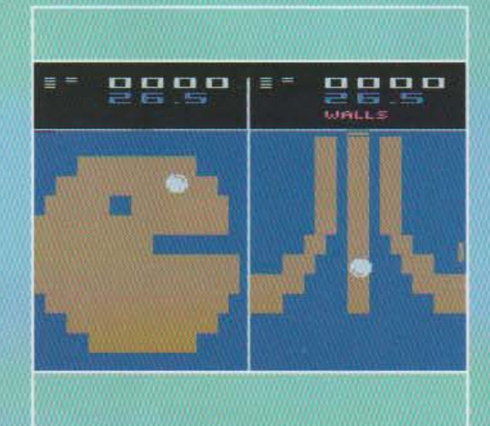
Look, **Edge** bought it for the articles, okay? There are some very good articles. **Edge** likes the articles

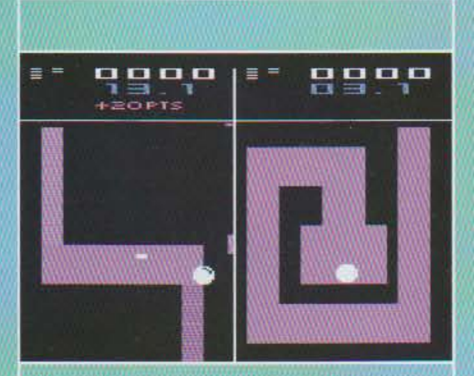




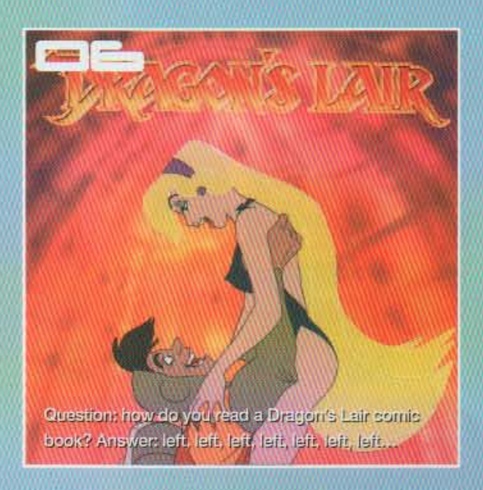
Look, **Edge** bought it for the coding, okay? There is some very good coding. **Edge** likes the coding







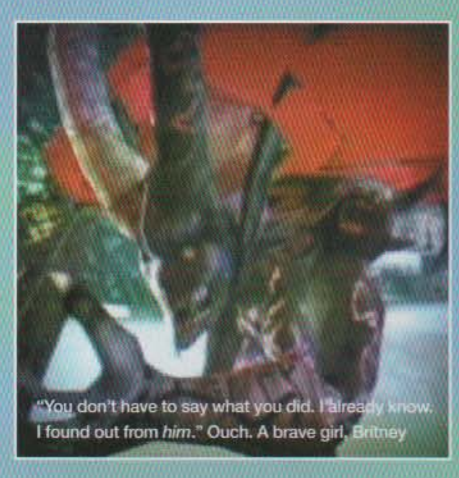
Next up for retro translation: a Spectrum version of *Halo*, and *GTAIII* on the Dragon 32. Hopefully



Question: how do you read a Dragon's Lair comic book? Answer: left, left, left, left, left, left, left...







"You don't have to say what you did. I already know. I found out from *him*." Ouch. A brave girl, Britney



"I bet you didn't think that it would come crashing down, no." With Raiko, it's practically a certainty





Is that *Quake* in your pocket, or are you just pleased to see **Edge**? That doesn't really work, does it?



Okay, never mind. The point is that Pocketeers' work is excellent. Go see it moving at its Website

06 Dead horse flogged

US: *Dragon's Lair* – digital proof that, no, they don't make 'em like they used to, and we should all be very thankful – is back again, and it's even more static than usual. The 'Dragon's Lair' comic books, signed to MV Creations in a terrifying 'unlimited title' deal, will feature the adventures of Dirk the Daring, Princess Daphne and other Bluth-created characters. "We're thrilled to work with MV Creations in creating another medium so *Dragon's Lair* fans can continue their adventures with Dirk the Daring even when they're not playing the game," says **Rick Dyer**, president and CEO of Dragon's Lair LLC, Dragonstone Software and the game's original designer. "You can *play Dragon's Lair*?" replies **Edge**.

07 Hit me baby

Japan: Pick up a gossip mag at the moment and it's all about Britney and Justin. Timberlake's new single 'Cry Me a River' implying that their relationship ended because of Britney's preference for an unnamed thirdparty. Now, far be it from **Edge** to gossip, but it appears that she's been spending a lot of time with *O.TO.GI*'s Raiko lately, which gives surprising credence to Microsoft's previous claim that the Xbox played some part in the breakup. Britney's voicing an ad campaign for the game in Japan, and from December 11 to January 25, Japanese CD/DVD/Games chain Tsutaya gave a lottery ticket to consumers buying a CD on the Jive label. The prize draw included 150 Xbox/*O.TO.GI* packs, countless copies of the *O.TO.GI* soundtrack and thousands of Britney DVDs.

08 Pocket Money

UK: While some attribute the sad death of Crawfish down to morally dubious practice of publishers delaying payments, others attribute it to a wider malaise: that there's simply no money in the stuttering GBA market. **Edge** hopes that Pocketeers, founded by British developers Matthew Hopwood and David Garrison, finds a way around that, because the work on display at its Website looks very promising indeed. It's certainly the best 3D work on the platform; a football game and a thirdperson adventure are impressive enough, but the shots of its (unlicensed) port of *Quake* are simply stunning. Curious publishers who intend to pay their developers on time should visit www.pocketeers.com



Zoe Williams
Ubiquitous commentator in positive gaming commentary shock
Mothers Against Videogame Violence
So it turns out you *can* make this stuff up
The weather
Minus 9°C? Guess **Edge**'ll stay in and play *Prime*, then

Quit

US kiddies on Xbox Live
Look, you don't live anywhere *near* **Edge**'s mom
Vivendi's Lord of the Rings advert
No gameplay footage and misleading voiceover = confused parents
The weather
Minus 9°C? Oh, not *another* slippy slidey ice world level



09 Evolution

Ex-physicist turned hard-science sci-fi writer Stephen Baxter certainly doesn't have a problem grinding up the big issues into massmarket chunks. After books such as 'Time' and 'Space', he's gone all Charles Darwin in 'Evolution', his dramatisation of the ascent and descent of life on Earth. Taking a span from 145m years ago to 500m years into the future, his purpose, like that of Darwin, is to display the grandeur of life in general, and human life in particular. Clever enough not to get involved in the peculiarities of evolutionary mechanism – there's no direct view on punctuated equilibrium versus other current faves for example – Baxter takes the anthropomorphic route.

In his version at least, 65m years ago scampers a rat-like creature 'called' Purga; 55m years later, a primate called Dig is frozen by the Ice Age; 5m years on our attention shifts to an ape called Capo, and so on until we reach the apogee of human existence which Baxter marks at 2031. From then on it's downhill all the way thanks to the impact of ecological upheavals mixed with the spectaculars of global terrorism. But for the tomfoolery and wild conjecture, 'Evolution' certainly makes for a thought-provoking read, if one that's a little deterministic – we live, we die but don't worry, our genes carry on. Perhaps mindful of this, Baxter even attempts to shoehorn the concept of God into the equation with a cunning epilogue. Darwin would not be pleased.

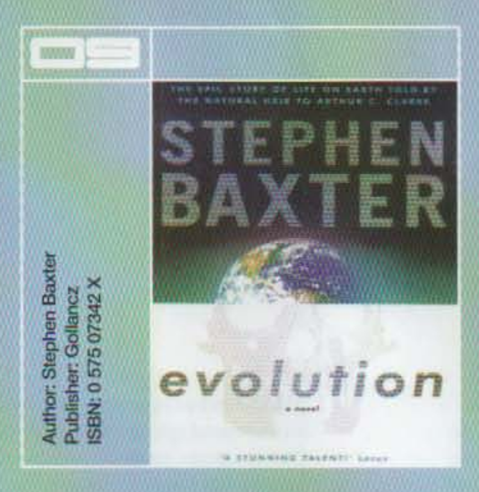
10 The Art of Deception

Briefly notable as the self-styled "most famous hacker in the world," Kevin Mitnick has followed the usual career path of his ilk since leaving prison – he's become a security consultant. Unfortunately that's one of the reasons his debut, 'The Art of Deception', isn't directly about his freewheeling cyberspace exploits. Despite the racy title, it's not even about computer hacking – although that may not be Mitnick's fault.

As part of his probation, he's not allowed to use a computer, so writing either the manual of 'How to Hack' or 'Every Hack I Ever Did' probably isn't in his best interests. Instead the book is more akin to a calling card for his consulting firm Defensive Thinking. Subtitled, 'Controlling the Human Element of Security', it focuses on social engineering: that is getting restricted information by pretending to be someone else and politely persuading your target to tell you. The most obvious example is of the secure system with the password written on a Post-it note stuck to the PC monitor.

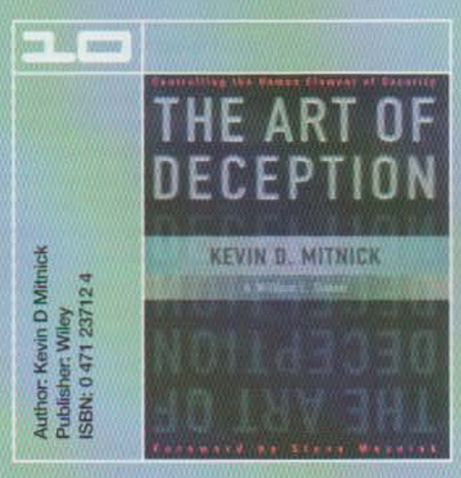
Thankfully 'The Art of Deception' is a little more engaging than this, with Mitnick illustrating his points with reportedly real-life situations. Best examples include Stanley Rifkin, who hacked $10m from a US bank just by knowing three internal code numbers, and the hacker who reconfigured the phone network to a prison so his partner-in-crime could make untapped outgoing calls. Still, this isn't the book Mitnick is obviously desperate to write. Here's hoping the wait won't be too long.

09



Author: Stephen Baxter
Publisher: Gollancz
ISBN: 0 575 07342 X

10



Author: Kevin D Mitnick
Publisher: Wiley
ISBN: 0 471 23712 4

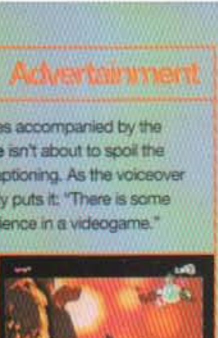
11



Site: **Shockwave Japan**
URL: **www.shockwave.co.jp**

11 Website of the month

Those familiar with the western Shockwave site will have seen many of the games here before, but there are still a few surprises, like the irrepressibly funky dance-matching game and a good deal more that **Edge** couldn't even begin to make sense of. The jigsaw puzzles are absorbing too, with some particularly beautiful nonsense in the animated section, **Edge**'s favourite being 'Octopus of Four Feet'. But the real reason **Edge** implores you to visit is the excellent *Zookeeper*, a work of cute genius which mixes classic timewaster *Bejewelled* with pixellated animals, and will quite likely consume whole afternoons of your life. 26,790, then. Be careful of the babies.



12 Advertainment

Japan: Gameplay sequences accompanied by the series' main BMG and **Edge** isn't about to spoil the purity with typical clumsy captioning. As the voiceover at the advert's end succinctly puts it: "There is some emotion you can only experience in a videogame."





Middle management talk in a language they've made up themselves, mostly to make the job of selling stuff seem more complex than it is. Tangent: RedEye's never been much of a baker, but he's pretty sure if you sat in on the patisserie industry's biannual conference, you'd find men in slightly rumpled, ill-fitting suits talking about worldwide projections for macaroons, and upselling every custard slice into a pack of four. Upselling, doublespeak-be-damned, is conning the consumer into buying more than they really want. You're buying a PS2? You'll want a multitap. Cube? You won't get the most out of your games without a GBA. And you'll want a frontlight with that, and a copy of *Yoshi's Island*, and hey, how about a hint book? Nah. Sure, RedEye isn't the greatest gamer in the world. But, thinking about it, he knows who is.

(Consider that for a moment. The Greatest Gamer in the World. Our God, if you want, or at least dreamt of as a younger gamer, many of which involve pretending to be a teenage girl. Several of the Xbox Live games contain league tables which nominally rank players according to their performance, but actually rank them according to how good they are at cheating. In *MotoGP*, winners cut corners; In *Unreal*, they turn off the console when they're losing. Obviously, the highs of the Live ladders are not where you will find the Greatest Gamer in the World; they are where you will find petulant teenagers with too much spare time.

Which isn't to say the Greatest Gamer in the World doesn't brag about their exploits – but more of that later. There are some games, such as Ubi Soft's beautiful (but ultimately mundane) *Splinter Cell*, which carry the Xbox Live logo on the cover, but don't offer any kind of Internet gaming. Instead, these games offer content for download, extra levels and missions and such, as a bonus for those

The only way that Prima could get that information, short of having The Greatest Gamer in the World on staff, is if it got it straight from source. So a theory: the developer makes the game, and, alongside the finished code, provides the publisher with comprehensive maps, cheats and solutions. The publisher pimps maps, cheats and solutions straight to a thirdparty, who distributes the information to thousand monkeys with a thousand copies of Quark. Eyes light up with dollar signs, and the money starts to come in. Everyone wins.

Do they? Doubtful. What's in it for them if the game's well-balanced? No one's going to buy a guide for something they can crack in a couple of days. Ever wondered why, when games are getting more complex, manuals are getting thinner? If publishers put too much information in there, then what's left to reveal in 'Game X: The Ultimate Guide'? Keep it vague. Upsell.



REDEYE

A sideways look at the videogame industry

Are gamers being short changed?

the God of those who care about better scores, quicker laps, faster reactions, higher stats. Screw Sujoy, Fatality, Big Boy Barry et al: watch the pupils flick and narrow on a single pixel, touch those never-cramping hypersensitive thumbs, scrape a fleck of dandruff from the scalp that hides the brain that rotates the *Tetris* blocks that blow your mind. Good God, Raelians, if you're going to clone someone, clone them: he – or maybe it's a she – is the Greatest Gamer in the World!)

RedEye pauses for a moment, and guesses that he would be in the top 10,000 gamers in the world. Top 1,000 maybe a few years ago, but not anymore, not since age atrophied his reactions past the point where practice will ever again make perfect. Although it's all very difficult to quantify, of course. The Greatest Gamer in the World needs genius in breadth and depth across all forms of game. He – or she, because maybe RedEye's going to give some of you a new teenage girl crush in a moment, children – is not weak at anything. New games appear and their challenge evaporates before they've hit the shelves. RedEye knows the Greatest Gamer in the World, or at least where you can find them, and he's going to tell you who it is. Now.

Well, in a moment. First, an aside. Regular readers will be aware of RedEye's feelings towards Xbox Live – briefly, that it is a fantastic invention that brings about many wonderful situations that RedEye committed to Live. Only it doesn't take a genius to see that it's not really a bonus at all – that players are just getting a cut-down game in the first place, with the option of downloading what they should be getting in the box. Unless, of course, you can't get broadband, in which case you're screwed. Bargain.

"There's only one place the Greatest Gamer in the World could possibly work… unless something underhand is going on"

Anyway, back to that Greatest Gamer in the World. Little backtrack at this point, because Redeye hasn't been entirely honest. He doesn't know the name of the Greatest Gamer in the World. He just knows where they work. There's only one place they could possibly work, because there's one business that couldn't possibly survive without them, unless something underhand is going on. The Greatest Gamer in the World works at Prima Games.

Think about it. Every time a major game comes out, even something whose development theoretically takes place in nuclear-grade secrecy such as *Mario Sunshine*, there's a Prima guide on the shelf the same day. Hell, major games chains bundle them together – "Listen, kids, we want you to spend 45 quid on this game, and then another ten on a book to completely ruin it for you." Imagine having that power, though. The power to destroy a game before it's even out. Unless… hold on.

And they upsell you for every penny. A publisher can sell you half a product as the full thing, and the rest for twice the price at the same time, because you'll have read in magazines, which get everything for free, that The Experience Isn't The Same Without This. It's why the PS2 only has two front ports, and why the Xbox needs a DVD kit, and why you're a second class citizen in *Animal Crossing* without a GBA. It's like when Take 2 split *Serious Sam* in half, but even that's got nothing on the worst offender.

This is what started RedEye thinking about instalment culture – that and a mouthy baker pushing cakes like they were stardust. Nintendo's beautiful, sleek, deviously crippled Game Boy Advance SP. It's gorgeous, it's – for the first time ever – quality gaming that fits in your pocket. It's a portable gaming machine, except there's no headphone socket. Well done, Nintendo, for showing up your competitors with the ultimate upsell, breaking your own aesthetics for an extra buck. Anyone want to guess the management speak for its strategy? Easy. Being bastards.

RedEye is a veteran videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with ***Edge's***

Travel the world, meet interesting people, and kill them. It appears to be a compelling offer. In the past few years a breed of games has attained great popularity in which violence is no longer the knee-jerk reflex of the twitch shooter, but a carefully planned and deliberate action. Welcome to the world of the murder simulator.

Ideas of concealment and careful killing had been around for a reasonably long time in 2D games, but it is only since the attainment of solid 3D environments, along with improvements in character detail, that true murder simulators, with their gleeful arms-race of visual realism, have been possible. We would mark the first naturalistic milestones around the time of *GoldenEye* and *Thief*, both of which placed heavy emphasis on silenced or distance weapons, and the avoidance of discovery by enemies. It is then only a short and bloody hop to what is perhaps the pinnacle of the genre today: *Hitman 2*.

Russian civilian on the underground, or whether you need to knife him to death and steal his clothes before he alerts a patrolling infantryman – are made more interesting by the game's reward structure.

In *Splinter Cell*, on the other hand, killing a certain number of civilians results in instant failure, and other missions are entirely designated no-kill zones. Though this does enforce proper exploitation of the game's excellent hide-and-seek mechanics, a feeling of top-down arbitrariness to these rules is exacerbated by the bizarre volte-face of the second Chinese Embassy mission. When you are first there, killing is off limits, but second time around, for underjustified narrative reasons, suddenly everyone is rifle fodder.

Splinter Cell's modes of careful killing – the stealthy grab, the pistol-whip and the body-dragging – are nicely engineered, but what the game really proves is that murder simulators depend just as much on environmental awareness as a repertoire of

those you are fooling are worth being fooled – that they have some minimum level of intelligence. This is where *Splinter Cell*'s illusion can regularly crumble: its AI is far inferior to the behaviour of *MGS2*'s guards.

Hitman 2, however, goes further in the opportunity it affords to really test your informational superiority, by walking past enemies in full daylight protected by nothing more than an appropriate outfit. The game's use of disguises is brilliantly conceived: particularly in the fact that they can be believably compromised by behaviour and proximity – the roadblock sentries in St Petersburg find nothing suspicious about you when you are reasonably far away and dressed like them, but get too close and they will notice that you are carrying a sniper rifle instead of one of their own standard-issue AK-47s.

You might say that in a really good murder simulator the actual murder is the icing on the cake. Some levels in *Hitman 2* can demand as much



TRIGGER HAPPY

Steven Poole

Exploring the new breed of videogame violence

Readers may object that 'murder simulator' is perhaps an excessively emotive and sensationalist term to apply to an accomplished and enjoyable game, but what description fits better? There is clearly a qualitative difference, a change in feel and emotion, between the fantasy wargames of something like *Halo* and Io's exquisitely planned assassinations.

Hitman 2, indeed, cleverly dramatises the visceral payoff of increased naturalism in its own training level, where the player is taught how to use the game's garroting device, the fibre wire, on a scarecrow in the church grounds. Practising the movements required on this stuffed dummy is a purely mechanical exercise, but the first time the player does it 'for real', something has changed. Without the visual realism this would be merely a formal puzzle, like the disappointing VR missions in *MGS Substance*. In the world of *Hitman 2*, it becomes a kill.

Hitman 2 recognises that the sadistic pleasure to be had from killing as many enemies as possible is a valid way to enjoy the game; on the other hand, it holds out a carrot for those who wish to refine their skills and withhold their violence sufficiently to receive the Silent Assassin rating. And the player can wander along this axis – between the twin poles of kill-everything-that-moves and take-down-only-the-target – with relative freedom. Tactical decisions – such as whether you have time to anaesthetise a

subtle violence. The light-shadow mechanic, developed and finessed from the days of *Thief*, can be compromised by the dubious AI – guards alerted by a single pistol ricochet can instantly develop the nightvision of cats and spot you in the darkest corner – but it provides ample opportunity for silently crowing

thought and imagination as a tactical sim like *Rainbow Six*, and however many people you choose to whack on the way to your goal, the final kill evinces not a mere psychopathic thrill but a serene sense of accomplishment. It's time to bite off the end of a cigar and say with George Peppard:

"Violence is no longer the knee-jerk reflex of the twitch shooter, but a carefully planned action. Welcome to the world of the murder simulator"

"Ha! You don't even know I'm here!" as a guard walks past within inches of your crouched form.

It is clear from this example, indeed, that murder simulators are primarily games that dramatise and make almost tangible a pleasurable feeling of informational superiority. The abysmal *State of Emergency* is not a murder simulator, because there is no contextual engineering, no sense of rhythm and discovery. The same is true of its big brother, *GTAIII*: killing people in Rockstar's game always feels somewhat impersonal, because it's so easy and the consequences can be neutralised.

A real murder simulator is about the primal, one-on-one encounter with a worthy foe, over whom you hold the trump card of information. You know you are there; he does not. But in order to luxuriate in such superiority, you have to believe at some level that

"I love it when a plan comes together."

But then, of course, you watch the walls of your toolshed fill up with new toys, and probably you won't be able to resist trying them out on a few unsuspecting guards in the next mission. Silent Assassin can wait: it's time for a few more gratuitous murders. Remembering the furore over *Hitman 2*'s depiction of Sikhs and the game's subsequent recoding, one is reminded that a naturalistic style always has political implications. And it remains to be seen for how much longer the ante of realism can be raised in the murder sim before we begin to find it more distasteful than pleasurable.

Steven Poole is the author of 'Trigger Happy: The Inner Life of Videogames' (Fourth Estate). Email: steven_poole@mac.com

Have you been to the cinema lately? I try to go as often as I can. A film I've been thinking about recently was 'Men in Black II', which I think is a very easy production to enjoy. You don't even need to have seen the previous film – you just sit there and take it all in. It's a basic thrill, but well done, and one that is ever more rare these days. It has dreams, challenges, a well-designed world and a solid storyline, all mixed together to provide a great, if disposable experience for the limited time the movie lasts.

So what makes 'MIBII' different from other films that possess the same attributes? I would point at its rhythm and tempo as the core reasons for its success, and I believe the same applies to games – that, essentially, games with bad rhythm and tempo are awful: even if the ideas are good, the erratic pace hides them, and

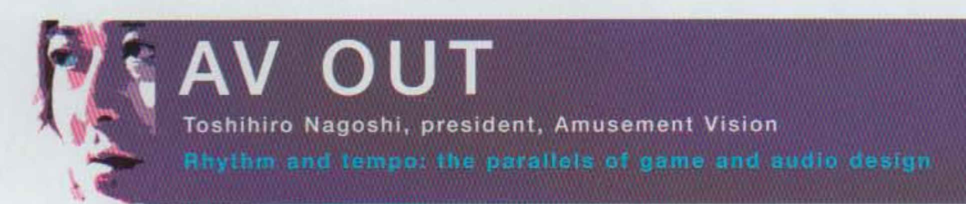
instruments together, so each will have its part, still within the two rules.

Is that clear? The orchestra conductor uses these two rules to reproduce a music score, and as his level of skill increases, you see two more factors being added: intensity and style. Let's apply this to videogames. Game creators are conductors. Take the example of driving games. The concept can be analogised to music types, of which there are many: rock, classic, pop, samba, and so on. Setting the concept defines the game. Let's choose rock, particularly heavy metal. The tempo is fast, so we should think about courses in that respect: dynamic, wild, with lots of intense changes as you race through. The road should not be smooth, it should feature lots of banks, bumps and curves. But that's just one lap, and it's not sufficient to really rock. "Okay then, how do you do that?" you

climax of the music track! The long and great guitar solo begins as you drift around the long curve. As the guitar solo ends, you're filled with a new sensation, straightening up, and ready to start your second run.

Well, that's how I see it. Writing this I can just feel me driving. I haven't even thought about backgrounds yet, just structure. If your game concept is well designed, the course designer will have no trouble producing backgrounds to match the game concept. Anyway, returning to the conducting analogy, the curves and bumps give the tempo of the game, while the handling provides the rhythm. Get it right, with the right visuals, and I think you would be able to rock quite hard. Of course, if you put blues music in there, all your efforts will be in vain. So, yes, you will have to use a good old heavy metal tune to perfect the game's impact.





AV OUT

Toshihiro Nagoshi, president, Amusement Vision

Rhythm and tempo: the parallels of game and audio design

it becomes useless. A month ago I was at the Tokyo International Computer Graphics Festival, where I had been invited to talk. I was asked this: "When you develop a driving game, what do you care about the most, or what do you think about?" I knew my response instantly. "When I develop a game," I replied, "not only driving games, rhythm is the factor I care the most about." It is an obvious statement to me, but the attendees did not appear to understand it very well. I tried to explain, but time was short and I wasn't able to make my point clearly. So let me try to do that here.

As I said at the conference, rhythm is commonly associated to music, right? So, what is rhythm about in music? In simple terms, it is about timing or, more explicitly, it is a rule which instruments follow in order to render a given track. Tempo, on the other hand, is about tension – speed control. When you increase the tempo, that accelerates the music. Doing the opposite will obviously slow it down.

There are two elements in music. The first is the music score displaying the *place* of the tones – rhythm – and the second is *when* you make them – tempo. The combination of the two allows you to reproduce a given track. It allows musicians to combine several

may ask. Look at it like this: there's a straight, a long wide view down a large track. You're going fast. You experience anxiety over what's coming next. And then you start to hear the music…

Let's drive. Suddenly, there's a drop. The angle is gut-wrenching, and the road is getting narrower. You fear you're going to crash against the barriers. And while the tension is at its peak, the intro is over, and the main part of the track is about to begin. The road veers upwards into a steep hill which twists into banks that defy gravity and corkscrew around. As you speed up, other cars swarm around you, bumping each other, weaving in front and behind. This section is designed to give you a taste of the game – as you twist through it, the guitars crash, giving you a great feeling. Then comes the 'sneaky' part, composed of gentle right and left curves, allowing players to drop their guard just in time for – the guitars crash again – a hard, unexpectedly steep hill to increase the tension again. At its peak, your car leaves the ground, and the view reveals a hell of a bend. This is the

"Put blues music in a driving game and all your efforts will be in vain. You have to use good old heavy metal to perfect the game's impact"

There is something else I always do when I design a circuit. I do a lap, and write down exactly how many times I turned left or right, and for how long. This seems like a small detail, but it's so important. It's natural that the first 3D model of the course you have designed may not fit your expectations, and that's when you use your data. "Right, right, left three seconds, then a little left and suddenly right, again left…" You can tell where it's different from the rhythm you wanted to give players, so you fix it. More intense investigations may find that the handling on the first and second laps differs, and, moreover, even if you think the handling is great, a beginner may say otherwise. To correct all these points, you need data. Does this remind you of anything? Yes, it's very similar to writing a music score – so perhaps composer is a better comparison than conductor. Whatever, I'll try my hardest to create the best music possible.

Toshihiro Nagoshi is president of Amusement Vision, formerly Sega subsidiary Soft R&D #4

First, I power on my computer to start to work... Then, I go to the company's cafeteria in order to buy a coffee. I don't forget to smoke my first cigarette of the day as well. Back to my desk, I check my emails while drinking my coffee. After replying if necessary to these emails, I power on my PlayStation2 and its monitor as well... I login to Vana'diel, the world of *Final Fantasy XI*. You know this is the MMRPG, the main attraction of Square's PlayOnline. I check for the money (GIL) I got from the shop where I put some items for sell. I also check for any items some friends have sent me and I have a look on my character's status. Well, I'm not ready to work...

I was asked to do a review of the year for my final column of 2002 but since *Final Fantasy XI*'s release on May 16 this year, this has been my everyday life until now. I am sorry to be talking about it once again but what time I have spent on this game! I even forget to go home, staying in front of the screen for hours. At the end, I have to sleep under my desk. I always have a camp bed in case this happens. Then, at the stroke of noon on November 26, 2002, *that* news awoke me from my sleep under my desk.

Towards the end of the year, a big news story stunned the industry in Japan. Yes, these two giants, Square and Enix, have officially disclosed their agreement to merge. Starting on April 1, 2003, a new company is going to start under a new name, Square-Enix. This news spread like a bushfire around the entire industry and became front-page news in every single magazine. Plus, just three days after this announcement, Enix made another one – and this one was no less important: the company is going to release *Dragon Quest VIII* on PS2. Yes, these three days have been incredible for the Japanese game industry, voiceless entered a very busy time. Square is obviously famous for its *Final Fantasy* series. But here Enix is even more famous for its *Dragon Quest* series. These two makers are merging. The media, both newspaper and television, reported the event as "The operation of the last hope" or "Will this be just a repetition of the Sega-Bandai disaster?" and so on. So that was the media spin, but what about users' reaction to this news? It is true that many are very excited about this big move. They are excited to be able to play games like *Dragon Quest VIII* and a new *Final Fantasy* in the near future. They have a feeling that each year will be marked by the release of such a big title. You can't be indifferent about this. It is said that this big operation will address the weaknesses of the two giants by combining their resources and knowhow. But there remain a number of muddy issues because not a lot has been officially disclosed about the specifics of this merger. I'm very excited about the birth of Square-Enix and I want to follow the event from now on. And who else won't?

At the beginning of my column I told you about my passion for *Final Fantasy XI*. It is my favourite game of 2002, no question, and therefore my highlight of the last 12 months.





TOKYO GAME LIFE

Lupin Kojima, assistant chief editor, 'Famitsu Wave DVD'

Japan's mega merger: what does it mean for online gaming?

To be honest, when I heard about the merger, I suddenly had this crazy idea in my head: *Dragon Quest Online*! Yes, with the merger of these two companies, it is hard not to have this in mind: the Japanese networked game market. Why is that? Just think about it. According to a recent issue of 'Weekly Famitsu', Square sold about 146,000 copies of *FFXI* up to December 12 – the figure including PS2 and PC versions. Okay, so this may not seem like a big deal in terms of standard 'package software' and, again, the media has shown no mercy, with outbursts such as "*FFXI*, the failure!" or "It's failed to be a hit...", etc. But this is a game you have to pay ¥1,280 (£7) per month to play. Fifty thousand to 100,000 gamers are said to have joined the PlayOnline service already. So it's simply not accurate to say that the game is not selling at all.

The great aspect of *FFXI*, of course, is that it has made the concept of online gaming seem more natural on a console. However, there are also many PC users – mostly fans of *Ultima Online* or *EverQuest* – who hate *FFXI* because it is very different to the sort of MMRPG you see on computer systems. But keep in mind that *FFXI* has been initially designed to be strictly a console MMRPG, and in that sense I don't see any other game developed with so much care and creativity, especially in terms of its various play systems. No, personally I prefer to think it is even better than the likes of *Ultima Online* or *EverQuest*.

Besides, these PC games do not have the sufficient power in terms of presence to make online gaming popular in Japan. Over here, the development of online gaming is down to two games – I'm talking, of course, about *Phantasy Star Online* on Dreamcast and *Final Fantasy XI* on PlayStation2 (no need to say that this is by far the most popular platform right now). But now, in late 2002, and looking into 2003... well, while the birth of Square-Enix is seen by many to be the establishment of the world's biggest game developer, I believe that this may push the Japanese online market, develop it and make it successful. I believe we will not have to wait long to see the first online game coming from Japan to overseas markets.

"There are many PC users – mostly fans of Ultima Online and EverQuest – who hate Final Fantasy XI because it is a different type of MMRPG"

But sadly, I will not be here to share that moment with you. This month is my last Tokyo Game Life column for **Edge** magazine. Over the last year I have tried to give you a taste of the events that were most significant for Japanese players and I hope you got some good impressions of what it means to be a gamer here. It is a complicated market with many genres – many more than in the west – and many enthusiastic followers of particular videogame companies. It is also a market that includes many individuals of many ages and backgrounds – when I visit the shops in Akihabara I often see children standing alongside business men looking at that week's new game releases.

Anyway, I must go now. Who knows, perhaps we will meet online! After all, this is what I felt this year of Tokyo Game Life 2002: it has been an online revolution! Bye everyone!

Lupin Kojima is the assistant chief editor of 'Famitsu Wave DVD', part of the Famitsu publishing portfolio

Edge's most wanted

Dynasty Warriors 3: Xtreme Legends

Pitched somewhere between a sequel and an upgrade, *Crimson Sea* has whet our appetites for a return to Koei's historical multi-combo battlefields.



(PlayStation2) Koei

Indy Racing League

From the boys that would have brought you the very promising *F355 Challenge* should come an exciting, realistic – though perfectly accessible – Indy game.



(Xbox, PC, PS2) Codemasters

Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life

As far away from failing government subsidies and mad cow disease as you can imagine. GBA link-up is likely to make this as beguiling as *Animal Crossing*.



(GameCube) Nintendo

Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic

Take a party of Twi'leks, Wookiees and droids to Kashyyyk, Dantooine and Korriban. Likely to improve your 'Star Wars' quiz knowledge if nothing else.



(Xbox) LucasArts

Edge doesn't make games

But if we did, they'd probably be the best games in the world...

Although it's still early days, **Edge** has high hopes for *Unity*, the latest brainchild of the legendary Jeff Minter, currently being developed under the auspices of Lionhead's Satellite programme (see p40). In fact, though we hate to boast, it's possible that Lionhead wouldn't have shown any interest were it not for **Edge**'s own intervention. But it's interesting to think that the company might not even have had a choice in the matter had Atari decided to hire Minter to produce another instalment in the *Tempest* series – a series that's so far mostly been confined to defunct or niche hardware platforms.

Infogrames is evidently struggling to find a relevant modern identity for the Atari brand. Surely hiring Minter would have made sense in such a context; it certainly would have guaranteed an exceedingly playable title, developed at a relatively low cost. And it would have provided an opportunity for Infogrames to establish a new identity for the Atari brand, based on integrity and creativity. It may even have been possible to use such a well-recognised brand to turn the experimental into the mainstream.

That Atari chose not to produce a new version of *Tempest* – focusing instead on properties such as *Terminator* and *Test Drive* – is indicative of the risk aversion that's endemic among the publishing community. What's worrying is that this issue's lead news story (see p6) demonstrates that various companies are failing to reap the rewards of the present market peak, and it's likely that a lot will fall by the wayside during forthcoming lean years. By contrast, the Japanese videogame publishing community has reacted to a peaking market – against a backdrop of general recession – by taking a greater number of creative risks.

While this is no guarantee that the Japanese industry will be healthier than its western counterpart in years to come, it's certainly indicative of the greater esteem in which the medium is held. Videogames are simply more firmly entrenched in Japanese culture. Thus, a lot of good businessmen understand videogames. By contrast, in the west, good businessmen are very rarely familiar with videogames; a lot of the people working in the games industry just aren't familiar with or interested in the product that they're churning out. And as long as this remains the case, it will be futile to expect the western industry to adequately prepare for the future.













Rome: Total War

The Total War armies have donned their sandals once more and are on the march to conquer domain of the next-generation RTS



Flaming pigs

Another advantage of the new graphics engine is that it can more easily create units of any scale. This means we get to see the large-eared beast favoured by Hannibal and his fellow Carthagians on the battlefield. Clearly unpredictable, but suitably puissant, they act like the tanks of the ancient world. Interestingly, one of the better counter-attacks is to set loose pigs covered with flaming tar to charge at them. History is a strange place.

The word 'epic' is one of the most over-used in the videogame journalist's litany. Anything that shows any more ambition than simply being a block-based *Tetris* clone will, at some point in its development, be labelled an epic by a troubled hack. However, epic doesn't just imply a sense of ambition – it requires a feeling of ludicrousness. It doesn't just need to seem bigger than you – but bigger than what you thought possible.

The *Total War* games, in their two previous PC iterations, have never been anything but genuine epics. The first, *Shogun*, centred on the first accurate realtime take on mass-formation warfare, taking appropriately from the seminal Sun Tzu's 'Art of War' and integrating it in-game. However, by tying together the conflicts with a free-form 'Risk' high-level strategy approach rather than the traditional pre-designed campaign, managed to add a sense of genuine importance to the conflict. The gamer was all too aware of the consequences of a failed victory. The sequel, *Medieval*, expanded the strategic game massively, moving the field of conflict from the east to Crusades-period Europe. However, due to its expansion, the strategic phase provided the focus for most players' attention. Put simply, the pendulum had swung from the tactical to the strategic phase.

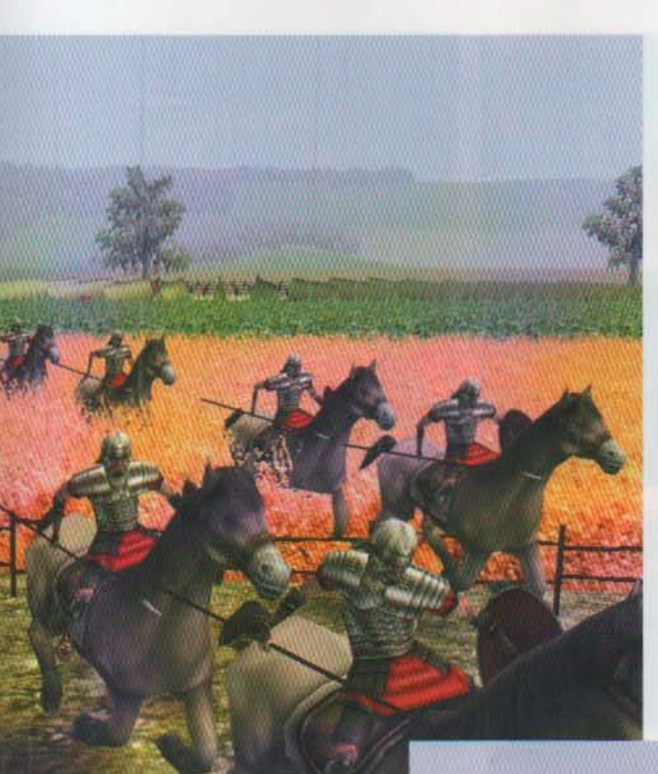
With *Rome*, the weight returns towards a more central position. What seems to have stopped the advance of the Battle mode was a purely technological one, with *Medieval* being based on a virtually identical engine to *Shogun*. Now, with a graphics system that allows to throw around comparable amounts of troops to the first two games – which include more onscreen troops than any of its RTS peers, with the possible exception of CDV's rather tedious *Cossacks* – but in gloriously constructed polygonal, motional captured models instead of plain bitmaps.

There's an equal expansion of detail in the other areas too. While *Medieval* was limited to simple rings of fortifications, *Rome* is capable of rendering sprawling cities to conjure all the half-remembered glories of a lost age – and then, with its use of fire, burning it down. Expect the full degree of lighting effects, with day-night cycles and the stirring sight of thousands of torch-bearing legionaries embarking on night attacks.

However, though these are a quantum leap in quality over any of its genre, a welcome inclusive approach to lower spec machines is promised. One of the promised technologies is the amount of texture memory required to display detail. As little as 4Mb of video textures will be required to run the game, while still taking advantage of the next-gen powerhouses. Also the developer claims that the engine, two years in development, achieves better framerates with eight full armies than the release version of *Medieval*.

Despite the most obvious enhancements being in the Battle mode, the strategic side has had an equally dramatic retooling and

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Activision**
Developer: **Creative Assembly**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **Christmas**





***Rome: Total War* features more polygonal, motion-captured soldiers onscreen at any one time than any of its rivals. The really good news, however, is that the game still runs well on lower-spec machines**



approach. Firstly, the neatly segmented 'Risk'-board leaning is entirely removed. Instead, a flowing map of Europe and North Africa is promised, allowing commanders to navigate across a map accurately rather than in an abstraction. This allows, fortresses to be placed at choke points in the map, valleys to be defended and a far more accurate representation of the options presented to period commanders. In fact, this 5:1 scale map can theoretically be zoomed down to at any point, allowing over 10,000 possible fields of conflict. Equally, when observing any of your cities, your individual expansions are visible, including great works such as the towering Colossus of Rhodes.

On the smaller design front, Creative Assembly has taken the advice of those who found being thrown into the full strategic game to conquer Europe too much in *Medieval*, and constructed mini-campaigns, set in a smaller section of the board, to allow the nervous to experiment and the experienced to play a short game in a couple of days. These are based around historic escapades such as Julius Caesar's conquering of Gaul, Spartacus' slave revolt and Hannibal's march across the Alps.

From its first appearance, the *Total War* series was arguably the only real progressive element in a genre that seems devoted to questioningly sustaining a dogma of construction, tank-rush and all the other clichés. While *Medieval* and *Shogun* showed that there's another way, and hoped that they'd follow, *Rome* ups the ante. If it fulfils its potential, we'll come to hail Caesar, and bury the rest of the genre.







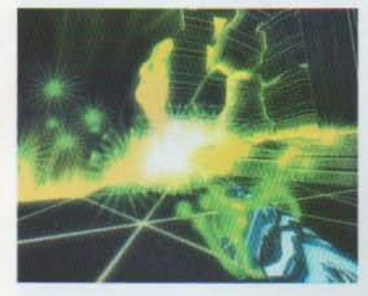
Tron 2.0

Crisp and elegant, 'Tron's beauty was eye-catching and memorable, but can this new adventure be more than just a light cycle nostalgia trip?









These light effects are courtesy of the LithTech Triton System, previously responsible for generating the environments in *No One Lives Forever*. Visually it's wondrous and immaculate, but whether the combat and adventure sections hang together is another matter

The abstract beauty of 'Tron' ensured that the film would never date. Well, not much anyway. Bruce Boxleitner's acting, a Cold War generation's fear of megalomaniacal machinery and the naive 'real world' techno mumbo-jumbo ("Boy, if we were inside, I know how to forge us a group six access," says Jeff Bridge's character at one point) are very much a product of the '80s. But once Disney's classic film enters its electronic universe, wow – for teenagers it marked the acceptance of videogames as part of modern culture.

Bally Midway's 1982 arcade classic caught the film's spirit with considerable chutzpah, and then nothing. Of course, there have been a few light cycle rip-offs speeding through cyberspace over the years, but it has taken until now for Disney Interactive to endorse an official update to the thrilling original. Appropriately, this marks the film's 20th anniversary.

Fans will be delighted to hear that Monolith's *Tron 2.0* contains as much, if not more, excruciating pseudo-philosophical technobabble as the original film. The game is set 20 years after the movie and you play the son of Alan Bradley, who you may remember was the computer expert who created the original Tron program. After rediscovering the correction algorithms, that are needed to digitise a human being into a computer, Bradley Sr is abducted by the sinister fCON Corporation. As Jet it is your job to infiltrate cyberspace and defeat the corporation that wants to use the Tron program for evil ends. It would seem that the elaborate plot is not the game's strongest card.

In terms of mechanics there is nothing here to surprise. The thirdperson action adventuring links together some of 'Tron's more classic arena combat. And as the film captured so well, this is Roman amphitheatre spectacle where losing equals ignominious death, or in 'Tron' terms, becoming 'de-resed'. **Edge** has sampled two of these elements: the disc combat and the light cycles. Although power-ups (such as shields and speed boosts) have been added to the light cycle combat, it has lost nothing of its abstract thrill. With the wonderfully whooshy

"This is Roman amphitheatre spectacle where losing equals ignominious death, or in 'Tron' terms, becoming 'de-resed'"











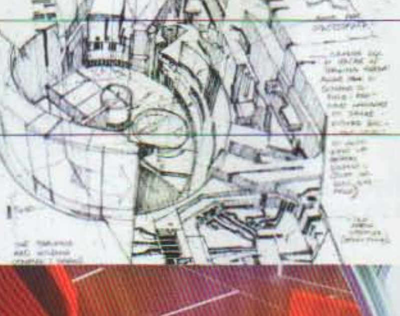
The light cycle games are playing exceptionally well and are likely to be worth the admission fee alone. Power-ups have been added and there's a new bike created by the light cycle designer, Syd Mead

sound effects in place the light cycle sections are furiously addictive. The disc sections are, as yet, not so convincing. Projectile physics need tweaking and the game itself is less intense, more a case of block, throw, repeat. But there's time to fix things.

To Monolith's credit the thirdperson adventuring has been bolstered by an interesting skill structure. Upgrades are acquired by downloading subroutines from terminals. Every system that you enter, be it a mainframe, Internet hub or PDA all have system requirements. Some systems take a smaller memory 'footprint' of yourself into the environment so you might have to strip down some of your skills. Typical skill upgrades include speed boosts, shields and a higher jump.

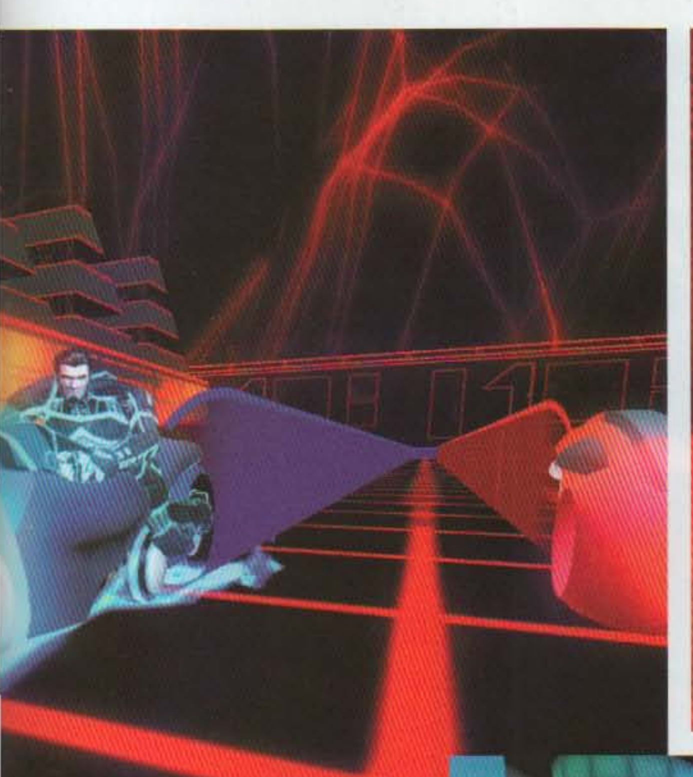
Weapon upgrades work in a similar manner. There are four primitives: the disc, the rod, an organic weapon based on the enemies' guns and a technology based on fCON Corporation's correction algorithms. Sincere apologies for the vague explanation of the last two but Monolith is staying frustratingly tight-lipped about how these weapons will evolve during the game.

Less impressive are the wandering about elements – they are interspersed with lame combat and confusing level design, which, ironically, isn't helped by the stark visuals. Although the basic AI could be attributed to



Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Disney Interactive**
Developer: **Monolith**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Spring**

Previously in **E111**, **E112**





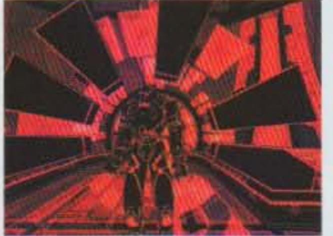


Enemy AI is currently poor, but Monolith promises that this will be improved before final release

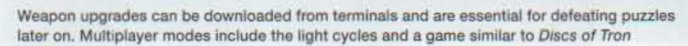
gameworld internal consistency – grunt-like computer programs with mechanical loops, etc – it doesn't make the rather brainless battles any more satisfying. Once weapons are upgraded – the disc, for instance, can eventually bounce from walls – things improve slightly, but present evidence suggests that the firstperson combat might be unsatisfying.

Tron 2.0 remains an interesting prospect, but question marks remain over whether its constituent components will hang together in a cohesive manner. In terms of the *Tron* franchise having ongoing success and reaching another level, it's likely to be more of a Bruce Boxleitner than a Jeff Bridges.









Weapon upgrades can be downloaded from terminals and are essential for defeating puzzles later on. Multiplayer modes include the light cycles and a game similar to *Discs of Tron*

Mark of Kri

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **SCEE**
Developer: **SCEA (San Diego Studio)**
Origin: **US**
Release: **March 21**

Chop, chop, chop: the list of free-roaming hack 'n' slash titles increases, but Sony's latest has much to recommend it...















Get the timing and distance right and you can perform an impressive number of special moves to cut, slice and dice your army of opponents

Bird on a wire

One other notable gameplay feature is the addition of a familiar that can be used to help solve simple switch puzzles and scope the area ahead. Kuzo, your spirit guide, can be directed to perches in the game environment by pressing the L2 button. It's an effective element that could well add a strategic bent to an otherwise slash happy title.



Mark of Kri has been showcased a few times but, with little to crow about in terms of playable code, **Edge** has decided to hold fire. Until now that is, and initial impressions are very pleasing indeed. Thirdperson combat in the third dimension has progressed at a snail's pace since the mid-'90s. With the exception of Shinji Mikami's *Devil May Cry* there have been few such games to offer anything more than *Golden Axe* translated to a free roaming plane. Sony has, however, tried for something a little more sophisticated, while keeping things refreshingly simple.

The game's hack 'n' slashery is immediate, reflecting OTT Japanese choreography found in TV programmes such as 'The Water Margin'. Numerous opponents can be taken on at the same time and there's a great sense of empowerment when you dispatch several foes with a few combos. Enemies can be targeted by sweeping around the right analogue stick, then each foe is highlighted with one of the PS2 button symbols. Pressing the corresponding button unleashes an attack on the designated target. Limited *Tekken*-style timing is also required to launch combos, pressing one X and three squares, for instance, delivers a Fua Toku Rutu attack that sees your enemy slump to the ground in a splash of blood. Although **Edge** has only fought against weaklings, the system appears robust and satisfying. Button-bashing does reap rewards, but hopefully more savvy adversaries, encountered later, will eliminate such lazy tactics.

Mark of Kri is also distinguished in the visual department, displaying refreshing anime leanings wrapped up in colourful environments. The plot, too, is delivered effectively in what might be described as comic book Kurosawa. The first level opens with the hero, Rau, taking on a group of bandits threatening his village. Unsurprisingly, he must take them all out in a frenzy of violence.

If *Mark of Kri* manages to encourage technique and skill rather than mindless action then it could well prove to be another feather in Sony's cap.



The scenery is lush and the quality of animation fits the impeccable presentation seen elsewhere

Dino Crisis 3

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **TBC**

Capcom's familiar dinosaur-shooting franchise is back. Except it's not quite as familiar as it once was...

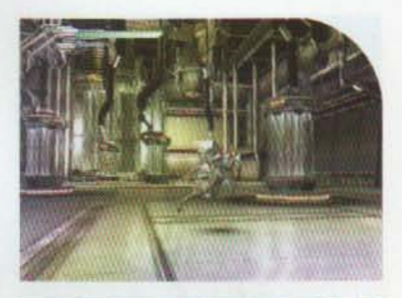


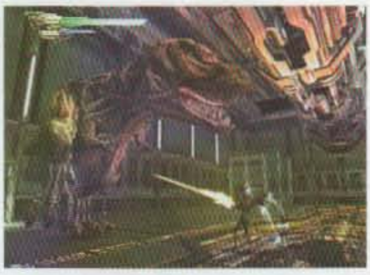
The jetpack flight shooter gameplay is an innovative slant on the familiar survival horror set-up of previous *Dino Crisis* titles

An early demo of the latest *Dino Crisis* shooter featured a guy in a jetpack blasting dinosaurs within an enormous spaceship – some departure from the near-future island and jungle settings of the initial two titles. Clearly it's all part of Shinji Mikami's plan to open new creative avenues for his teams. Last month, **Edge** revealed the company's five offbeat GC offerings, including manga romp, *Killer 7* and birdman warfare sim, *Dead Phoenix*. Now the idea is to produce an innovative experience but to lessen the risk by using a brand familiar enough to arouse interest, without being so beloved that a thematic re-think has otaku storming the gates of Capcom. *Dino Crisis* is that brand.

The action takes place in the distant future, when a spaceship – thought lost hundreds of years before – suddenly turns up orbiting Earth. You play one of the commandos sent to investigate, and discover that a genetic experiment has created an army of dinosaurs, which, of course, must be destroyed.

There are rumours that the spacecraft morphs and re-orders itself, depending on the actions and of the player, in order to maintain an ever-changing challenge. It's all about providing a pure gameplay experience apparently – but **Edge** feels Mikami-san may have been having secret chats with Mizuguchi-san over an absinthe or four.





For the spacecraft design, Capcom is using a similar sparse, metallic techno look to that seen in its forthcoming GameCube shooter *P.N.03*

Ice Nine

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Bam! Entertainment**
Developer: **Torus Games**
Origin: **Australia**
Release: **June**

Contemporary themes of terrorism and computer crime interconnect in Bam! Entertainment's ambitious take on the stealth/conspiracy sub-genre





Locations include the CIA training camp in Virginia and a terrorist outpost complete with requisite submarine base



There are 15 enemy characters, all with different behaviours and skills. Each exhibits standard AI responses – calling for back-up and legging it when the ammo runs dry

While the 'X-Files' may have been processed and dumped in the out-tray marked 'cancelled', conspiracy-as-entertainment is still alive and well in videogames. This firstperson stealth adventure places you in control of rookie CIA operative, James Clayton, who must prevent the deployment of Ice Nine, a powerful computer virus capable of bringing whole cities to a halt. The twist is, while carrying out the game's successive missions, players can make key moral decisions – either following the CIA guide book to the letter, or defecting and working for Chinese terrorist organisation The Xu.

The influence of *Deus Ex* looms over the game like Mulder's cigarette-smoking nemesis. There are 20 gadgets and weapons to pick up allowing both violent and tactical styles of play, and you get a co-agent (Layla) whose allegiances are unknown. There are also 'undercover time' sections where you must don the clothing of downed enemies and listen in on conversations. All this is wrapped up in an allegedly advanced physics engine and injected with some nice AI touches (baddies will attempt to throw back grenades that you launch at them).

The CIA. Catastrophic viruses. Global terrorism. *Ice Nine* couldn't be more zeitgeist if it made Saddam an end of level boss. Oh, has **Edge** given the finale away?

Return to Castle Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Activision**
Developer: **Mad Doc Software**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Summer**

In short: undead leather-clad Nazis are coming to North Africa. Stop them...

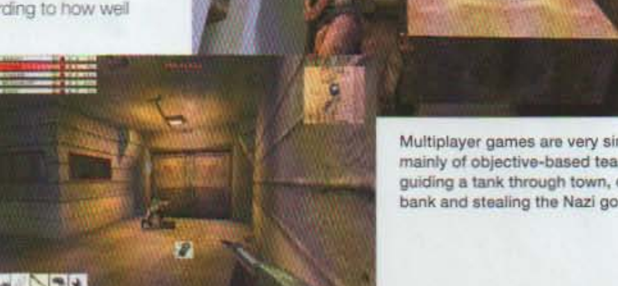




This is survival of the fittest in digital form. Those who perform well get all the skill points – those who don't, get to be bullied incessantly

If the multiplayer aspect of the original *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* was *Counter-Strike*-lite, then the singleplayer mode of *Enemy Territory* is *Operation Flashpoint Jr*. The player still plays BJ Blascowicz, but this time he's part of a squad, the other soldiers controlled by the CPU and following your orders. Each has a specialist role – sniper, medic, engineer and so on – and must be deployed correctly to solve rudimentary puzzles. Not that this is really a test of intellect, of course: *Wolfenstein* is about showing no mercy to the evil Axis, and *Enemy Territory*'s dynamic is still firmly in the 'shoot first, pun later' camp.

The most interesting addition is in the multiplayer game with the 'advancement' system, which rewards players according to how well they've performed in each round. Shoot accurately and use your class abilities well, and you'll go up a military rank. As your rank gets higher, so your character's basic stats improve; perhaps you'll move a little faster, or be able to spot mines laid by opponents, and so on. This might prove an incentive to keep playing; equally, it might just unbalance the game by making the good players even better. Hardened soldiers will find out soon enough: a multiplayer test version is expected imminently.



Multiplayer games are very similar and consist mainly of objective-based team missions – guiding a tank through town, or breaking into a bank and stealing the Nazi gold, for example

Return to Castle Wolfenstein: Tides of War

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Activision**
Developer: **Nerve Software**
Origin: **US**
Release: **March**

Run down corridor, shoot Nazi, run down corridor, shoot Nazi, run down corridor, die, reload...

Writing a preview of a WWII FPS is more complex than you might imagine: no matter what you write and how you dress it up, it's all been done before. Just like designing an FPS, then – *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* was fine, but nothing special – it's all been done before, you see – and a no frills port to Xbox wouldn't warrant a half-page preview. Thankfully, this looks like being more than that. A new singleplayer campaign (a prologue to the adventure, which sees super-soldier BJ Blascowicz taking on mystical Himmler and an army of undead biomechanical Nazis) will entice those who enjoyed the PC version, but it's the Xbox Live element that really interests **Edge**.

Just like the PC version, the multiplayer game feels like a dumbed-down *Counter-Strike* – fast and furious, but offering reasonable tactical depths for those prepared to think before they shoot. Unlike the PC, though, the Xbox has voice comms as standard, which means players can now issue and receive orders instantly, and it adds to the game both tactically and atmospherically. **Edge** took part in an eightplayer team game – Nerve hopes to have up to 16 in the finished version – and it's clear that, regardless of the singleplayer game's mediocrity, the multiplayer has the potential to prove a key part of Live's ever-strengthening line-up.



PC owners may sneer at the lower resolution of *Wolfenstein*'s Xbox incarnation, but console owners have their own reasons to be smug too





And Edge isn't just referring the improved multiplayer, either – more that at least you'll be sure of being able to get the thing running

Prescreen Alphas This month's announcements and updates...

Dekotora Densetsu

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Spike
Developer: Human





Deliver merchandise as fast as you can all over Japan. Avoid obstructive tactics of rival truckers (damaged goods are worth less), customise your rig, engage in minigames, and so on...

Primal

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: SCEE
Developer: In-house (Cambridge Studio)



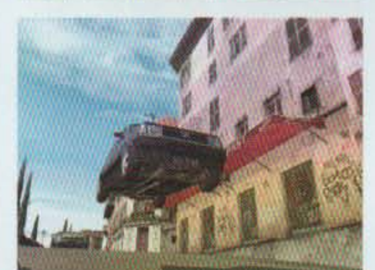


Delays mean that this girl-power game will now come out after Lara's next adventure. **Edge** is optimistic that the addition of a controllable companion will make this worth looking out for

Driver 3

Format: Xbox, PS2
Publisher: Infogrames
Developer: Reflections





Taking place in Miami, Istanbul and Nice (with vehicles such as a Citroen CX, Countach, and Mustang), the series finally benefits from the processing power it deserves (Xbox shots)

American Conquest

Format: PC
Publisher: Codemasters
Developer: 1C Company





Following the significant success of *Cossacks*, *American Conquest* aims to deliver an RTS that blends authenticity with enjoyability. With lots and lots of units onscreen at any one time

Drag on Dragoon

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Enix
Developer: In-house (Project: Dragonsphere)





Due this spring by a team comprising members of the *Ridge Racer* and *Ace Combat* series, this ambitious title mixes *Panzer Dragoon* and Shin *Sangokumusou 2*. Expect more on it next issue

Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Natsume





If you've never played a *Harvest Moon* game before then you've truly missed out. Planting crops and tending animals may seem tedious, but you'll soon take pride in your handywork

Starsky & Hutch

Format: GC, PS2, Xbox
Publisher: Empire
Developer: In-house





A demo of this driving/combat licence proved surprisingly enjoyable, and that was without trying all the possibilities of twoplayer action (eg one player drives while the other shoots)

Indy Racing League

Format: PS2, Xbox, PC
Publisher: Codemasters
Developer: Brain in a Jar





The official game to the world's fastest open-wheeled racing category features up to 33 cars on track at once and Codemasters' trademark accessible yet realistic handling model. Spring



Unity

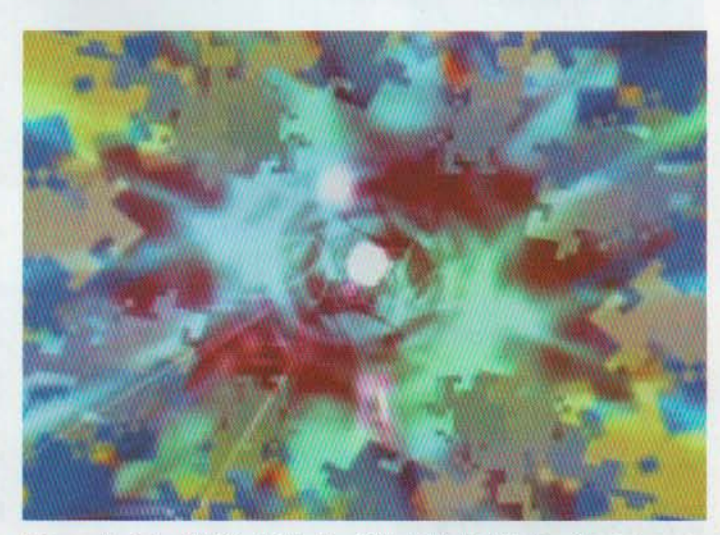
The fusion of music and mind-bending visuals has in some respects defined modern-day videogaming. Now, a 20-year industry legend is embarking on a project set to redefine the relationship between audio and entertainment

Veteran computer and videogame creator **Jeff Minter** is sitting in **Edge**'s games room and twiddling a controller hooked up to a GameCube dev kit. As his thumbs jiggle on the joypad, the images onscreen morph, stretch and distort to deliver the kind of lightshow you might expect normally to exist only within the chemically mashed brain of a gurning dance-music nut. Patterns warp and mutate. Colours bleed in and out of sight. Hollow vector tubes spin and rotate. "I just love the effects you can get out of this thing," says Minter, his eyes still transfixed on the shapes oozing and swirling across the screen. "It's fucking mad. It's madness."

What we're seeing is the result of three months' work. It is the embryonic form of Minter's newest project, a game dubbed *Unity*. 'Unity' because it brings together his loves: light synthesisers, music and shoot 'em ups.

Less than a year ago, Minter had seen the Nuon platform, on which he designed and coded the screamingly fabulous *Tempest 3000*, fizzle out and die. More recently he'd gone back to his bedroom coding roots, creating a string of titles for the PocketPC and selling them himself via the Internet. It wasn't a million miles away from the early '80s, when he assembled his Vic-20 cassette game cases by hand and sent them out to eager consumers via mail order. In the last few months, everything has changed. Like many other aspects of the *Unity* project, its beginnings were unusual, to say the least.

"It was [**Edge** publisher] James Binns who actually started the ball rolling," explains **Pete Hawley**, *Unity*'s



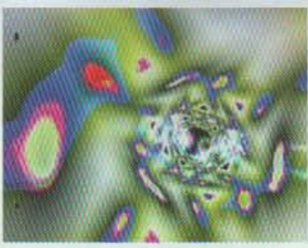
Unity currently exists as *VLM-3* (the third iteration of Minter's *Virtual Light Machine*, following Jag and Nuon versions) – the full light synth package will become available bit by bit as you progress through the game. *Unity* will be backed by a selection of high-profile (and currently secret) licensed music tracks



Photography: Martin Thompson

- Format: **GameCube**
- Publisher: **TBC**
- Developer: **Llamasoft/Lionhead**
- Release: **2004**
- Origin: **UK**











Minter is using *VLM-3* as a testbed for *Unity*'s levels, by tweaking settings and 'jamming' with the GameCube hardware. When he comes across an effect he particularly likes, he saves out the data which will later be used as a gaming environment. He initially harboured concerns about working on a "modern console," but finds the GC "delightful" in comparison to Nuon ("an absolute *beast*")

producer at Lionhead. "He rang me up one day and said, 'Your satellite scheme – does that stretch to individuals?' and I was like, well, not often. In fact, never. But we don't say no to anything, and certainly Peter Molyneux's probably one of the most open-minded bosses you could have, so James gave me Jeff's number and I rang him and asked him what he was doing and whether or not he was happy doing it.

"I asked him what it was that he ultimately wanted to do, and Jeff's reply was what you're going to see with *Unity*. If he had said, 'Well, I want to do *Gridrunner* on the Game Boy Advance,' then we may not have been interested. But the fact that Jeff wanted to unite his two technologies on a new bit of kit, and work on new, exciting stuff, it just sat well with Lionhead. You know, we don't do sequels, we don't do derivative stuff, we like working on new, original, creative ideas.

"So from there I went to Peter and it was just the easiest thing in the world. We had this board meeting and he said, 'Okay, any new business, any new opportunities?' And I said, 'Well, Jeff Minter, we'll buy him some hardware, we'll pay him a certain amount, and give him a year to see what happens.' And the board voted and that was it."

Jamming session

So Minter took delivery of his shiny new GameCube dev kit and began to 'jam'. "I've only had the system three months so I'm just testing stuff out here," he explains as a moment of slowdown threatens to spoil the beautiful abstract imagery onscreen. "Everything I release will be 60Hz, I can guarantee that. There's no way I'd release anything with judders in it. This is so early – I've not been super-efficient with it, I'm just jamming with the hardware, really."

There's little doubt that *Unity* will look like no other videogame. The closest point of comparison is perhaps *Rez*, but Minter winces at this suggestion. "The game mechanic in *Rez* was always the same," he says, putting down his controller and getting into more serious mode. "It was *Panzer Dragoon* with its trance trousers on, wasn't it? There wasn't that much variety in the actual gameplay. The graphics were quite nice, but they were very self-consciously 'Tron'. It was like they'd imagined an abstract space that was like 'Tron', whereas the abstract spaces in *Unity* will see me jamming with the hardware and coming up with stuff. I want to have modern abstract as opposed to retro abstract, which I think *Rez* was.

"And there'll be more variety in the gameplay. I want to extend the idea which I began with *Tempest* of having the bonus rounds where you have a contrast between the very hectic shoot 'em up rounds and the levels where you're just travelling through space scoring points. The actual style of gameplay will change according to which environment you find yourself in. So you may find yourself in a space where you're zooming down a tube and shooting things much like *Tempest*; you may find yourself in a space where you're in an arena and you're swivelling around and the camera's sort of zooming about and enemies are firing at you from all sides and it's like *Llamatron* on acid. So there'll be various different styles of gameplay within the thing which you'll discover as you play through the game."

But such gameplay is still a long way off. In the meantime, Lionhead's PR representative has picked up a joypad and begun to play around. Within a few seconds a strangely organic form spirals into view. "I like the flower," she says. "It... mutates. That is so... lovely. And it's easy. Even a girl can use it. It's a little bit like meditating. It's like a kaleidoscope."

"It's like the ultimate kaleidoscope," says Minter with a laugh. "I'm glad you like it. Wait till I put a game in there. It'll knock your eyeballs out." The PR lady smiles.

Minter joins in on a second joypad (the software actually supports up to four users, each controlling separate visual elements) and begins to manipulate another graphical layer. He's back in dreamy mode now. "I am having *such* a good time doing this," he drools. "It's like a dream come true, it absolutely is."

"I just love the effects you can get out of this thing," says Minter, his eyes still transfixed on the shapes oozing and swirling across the screen. "It's fucking mad. It's madness"

The good life

He's often been called a hippie, and today Minter looks every bit the part, his ramshackle locks threatening to tangle with his chunky hand-knitted llama cardigan bearing traces of what appear to be animal hairs. If you didn't know that he spends his days wrestling with leading-edge computer hardware in the name of entertainment you'd be forgiven for thinking he was some kind of new-age farmer. In some respects he appears a man not of his time: his particular brand of videogame engineering – solitary, self-designed, answering only to himself – has long since been jettisoned by the suits who give today's projects the green light. Hawley, the Mr Corporate figure at **Edge**'s offices today, sees through such misgivings. "It's just like *The Movies* concept at Lionhead right now – if it's a great idea and a brilliant concept then we'll just run with it because that's something we're very passionate about," he says. "With publishers, I'm sure they look at the charts and say, 'Well, that's selling well, why aren't we doing a game like that?' And *Unity* is certainly a different type of game, but we'll be using Jeff's hard work to produce something that we can then show to publishers when we think it's ready."

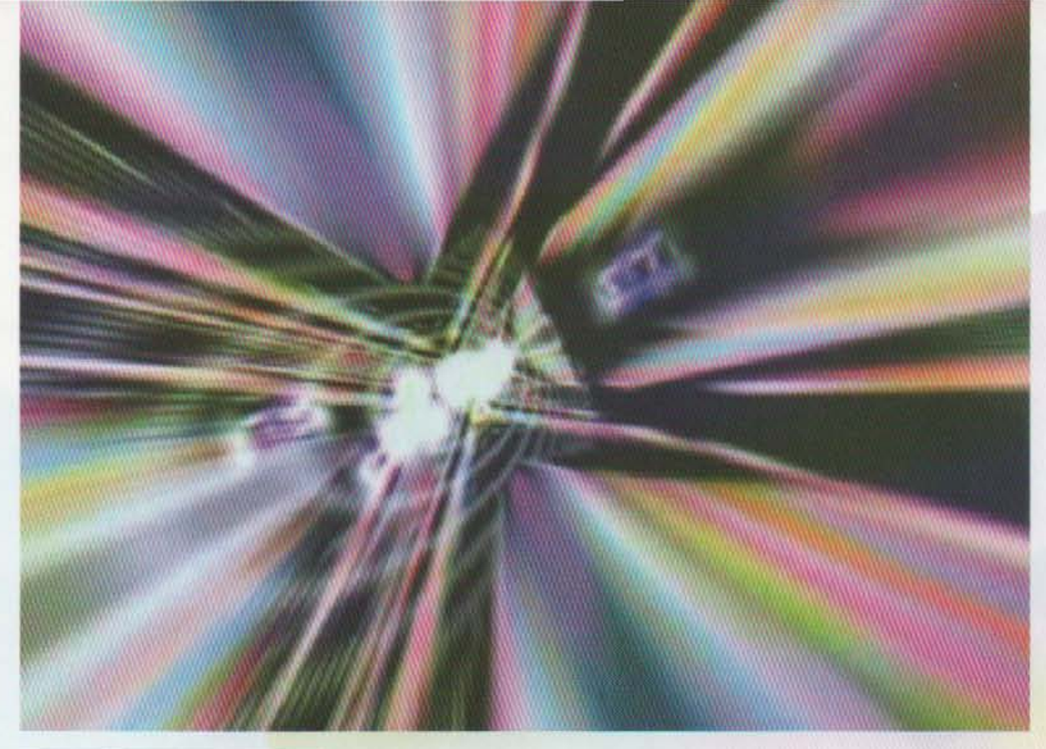
Ah, yes, when they think it's ready.

New tricks

Today's videogames are mostly made like this: developer goes to publisher with project outline (and possibly demo); publisher visits developer to kick its tyres; developer and publisher negotiate terms (bonuses, royalties, and so on and on and on); developer delivers 150-page design document, details for ten milestone submissions into run up to



Obviously there's no way of users feeding their own music into *Unity* running on a GameCube, but Minter says that you can put your own rhythms into *VLM-3* and 'jam' with the game's licensed music tracks











Minter intends to use maths-based solutions to create every visual element in the game. Boss characters, for example, won't necessarily require an awful lot of traditional art design work. If the game appears to be getting a little too abstract, however, there is a raft of Lionhead art muscle available to create traditional assets. One thing is certain: *Unity* will not look like any other videogame

alpha and beta phases and tons of other bits and pieces of info on paper that any good doctor would prescribe to hopeless insomniacs; development begins. Mention milestones to Minter and he immediately laughs. He doesn't look incredulous, he just titters. *Unity*'s not going to be developed like other games, is it? "The way I see it working," he explains, "is that I will describe to Lionhead the direction I think I need to go in and the kind of objectives I want to achieve along the way, and as long as I'm following along that arc I think they'll be happy, but within that environment I'll be free to play around with ideas and jam. The whole point about this is that you learn things about the hardware as you go along; it evolves, you continue to learn new tricks, so it does you no good to say right at the beginning that it's going to look like this or that. The game needs to evolve. Both the *Tempests* evolved as I went along and I think they came out all right. This will be much the same."

"That's the way Lionhead works, too," Hawley chips in. And that's also why *Black & White* was two years late? "Yeah. Until it's brilliant, it doesn't go out of the door. Importantly, with something like *Unity*, which is very organic, it'd be pointless to spell everything out at the beginning."

Nevertheless, **Edge** has a story to tell. What about the game's origins? "The idea was in my head in 1994," says Minter. "It arose when I'd just finished *Tempest 2000* and one of the guys at Atari came outside to me when I was having a fag break and he said he'd been playing it and it was like a combination of going to a concert and seeing a fantastic lightshow and playing a game at the same time. And of course I've had these two sides to my work over the years, which has been obviously shoot 'em up games – I've done lots of those – and light synths, which have been going on since 1984, when I did *Psychedelia*. So the idea for this is to bring both of those things together, to create a beautiful abstract shoot 'em up game. *Tempest* is a beautiful game, but you can go a lot further, you can actually start to bring in light synthesiser effects which go on while you're playing, so effectively you have a game which is a light synth and a light synth which is a game."

Minter has not enjoyed proper commercial success for many years, but his work has always found favour with the specialist press, thanks to two updates of *Tempest*. It must've been tempting to embark upon a third. Minter sighs. "If I keep doing iterations of *Tempest* it's always going to be someone else's game. It's always going to be, 'Oh, Jeff's only done another version of Dave Theurer's *Tempest*.' It's time that I did my own thing now, and people thought of my next game as *my* game and not Dave Theurer's game. As much respect as I have for *Tempest*, it's time to do my own thing."

Body of work

So it's a light synth that's also a game, it's not an update of *Tempest*, and it's going to have various types of gameplay styles. Will players control a spaceship?

Minter picks his words carefully. "You will be embodied. Um... I don't know if it'd be right to call it a spaceship. The embodiment is something again that I intend to work on. I would like for it to be fairly unique. I don't want to give too much away, but I do like the idea that as you play, your embodiment will actually evolve, so that as each player plays the game they will eventually end up with a different embodiment. That's something I need to work on and research, but I have a pretty good idea of how that's going to work. It'll be a thirdperson view, there may be a couple of firstperson levels – as in *Tempest*, perhaps – but the bulk of it will be thirdperson."

Minter is free to go and make what he wants; in this respect he has free reign, which could be both a blessing and a curse. His track record certainly speaks for itself – although his most recent accomplishments on consoles have seen him follow a fairly strict template. Some of **Edge**'s older readers may remember his earlier, more experimental titles such as *Iridis Alpha* and *Sheep in Space*, which many gamers simply didn't 'get'. He's now in a position to make his most visually abstract game yet. But that's not what he appears to be embarking upon – or, if he is, it's not going to be apparent from the moment you pick it up. "I think consumers will love *Unity*," says Minter, "because basically I'm going to make it so that when you first start playing it it is immediately accessible as a very nice feeling shoot 'em up game. Think of *Gridrunner* that I just did on the PC, the way you can just walk up to that and you don't have to mash the fire button, you can just sit there and move the mouse and it draws you in instantly – and then later on, stuff starts emerging. The early levels of *Unity* won't be too far mad out there, they'll be very accessible so that anybody can pick it up and hopefully be hooked so that when the scenarios do get a little weirder later on they'll be enjoying themselves so much



that they'll be pleased to carry on. I do realise that if I make it too weird straight out of the box people won't know what's going on."

So the ageing hippie is softening up, after all. The whole light synth angle, though – that's still a little bit out there, isn't it? "The thing with the light synth that I've found over the years is that hardly anyone would think to go out and buy one because they just don't know what it is, but once they see it they go, '*Wow*, that's really nice', and they really enjoy it. So *Unity* will introduce itself as just a regular game and it'll start to build light synth stuff around you, and hopefully when that starts happening you'll just go, '*Wow*, that's so cool'.

One-man band

Not many people in the videogame industry say 'wow' quite like Minter. It's a bit of a stoner's 'wow', more of a 'woahhoow'. To bring him back down to earth, **Edge** brings up the game's development schedule. He has 12 months in which to build something that'll convince the bods over at Lionhead that *Unity* could be something special. That's one man on new hardware in one year. "We have to bear in mind that Jeff's a one-man band," says Hawley. "But even with a team of many people you still need that ultimate person who's the project lead who makes a lot of those key design decisions because if you've got 25 or 30 people it's just as hard to design a game, really, because you've got ten, 20 different opinions, so you still need that one focal point. So in many respects it's easier with Jeff."

There is no concrete end date for the game. "We're working from October to October," explains Hawley, "so we have 12 months to get to a point where we can see we're really working towards something, and from that point, the fact that there's no army of animators – we don't need six or seven artists, we don't need a chain of network coders – that all makes life much easier. So once we're all decided on a direction, where the game's going to go, we can think about finishing the game."

It's a luxury few are experiencing at such a lean time for the UK development community. In this respect, Minter could hardly have chosen a better partner. "I don't think Lionhead's privileged in a negative sense," says Hawley. "But Peter's track record speaks for itself. There's never been a bad game to come out of that studio, whether it's Bullfrog or Lionhead, and Lionhead's next games will be no different – and Jeff's is no exception. We do enjoy a certain reputation, I suppose, but that's down to the effort we put into developing software. We don't nail people to the floor for milestones, we're very flexible. Everybody at Lionhead is a gameplayer first and foremost."

Crucially, Lionhead's interests don't stop simply at helping *Unity* turn from one man's pipe dream into reality. The company is lending its full support to Minter, from PR to audio engineering to graphics. "People at Lionhead have an interest," explains Hawley, "and if that becomes a requirement as the project goes on, if we decide that there are art elements that need addressing, with 3D objects or textures, etc, then there are people at Lionhead who've expressed an interest in getting involved. We've got two artists who are already keen to do something, but that's down to Jeff, really, and the direction of the game that we eventually come up with. In the same way, we have guys who've done lots of work with music division technology, and how that interface works – how you can modulate visuals to music – so that could be a help in the future."

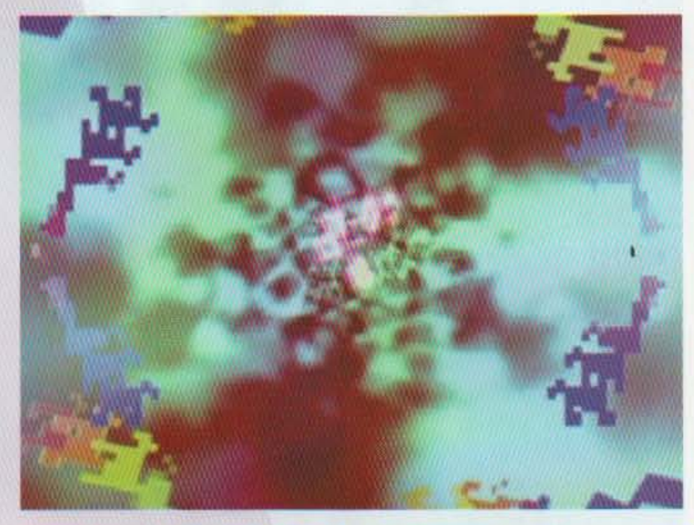
Renegade talent

With a renegade talent such as Minter, though, it must be a matter of enhancing his work rather than running the risk of getting in the way of it. Hawley appears to agree: "The goal is to keep Jeff doing what he does best but adding a whole layer of top-level production qualities, whether that is music production and engineering, whether it's on the visual side, or whether it's menus or 3D stuff to tie in with what Jeff's doing."

It's a known fact that Molyneux, despite his countless other responsibilities at Lionhead, still likes to get his hands dirty with coding. Perhaps he'll lend a hand. The PR lady adopts a mock frown. "Don't say that," she laughs. But the game's going to need a hi-score table, for example. "Yes," chuckles Hawley, "but if Peter did it we'd probably end up with little people building all the letters or something."

On this light note, it's decided that lunch is in order. At the restaurant, Minter appears to be enjoying his Thai food (lamb is conspicuous by its absence from his plate), but something's on his mind. It goes back to earlier talk of the development process nowadays, and how his methodology may not sit comfortably with an increasingly corporate industry. As he speaks, he becomes more animated than he has been all day: "One thing I would say, what with this whole business of milestones, what you have to bear in mind, over and above everything else, is that I'm so mad keen for this, I want this game, there's no way I'm ever going to slack, because I want to finish it because I want to sit and play it, I want this so badly, so I'm going to be working my tits off for it, there isn't a question of motivation or anything like that, I don't need to be driven, I *am* driven. I want this so bad."

There aren't enough people in the industry like him. 



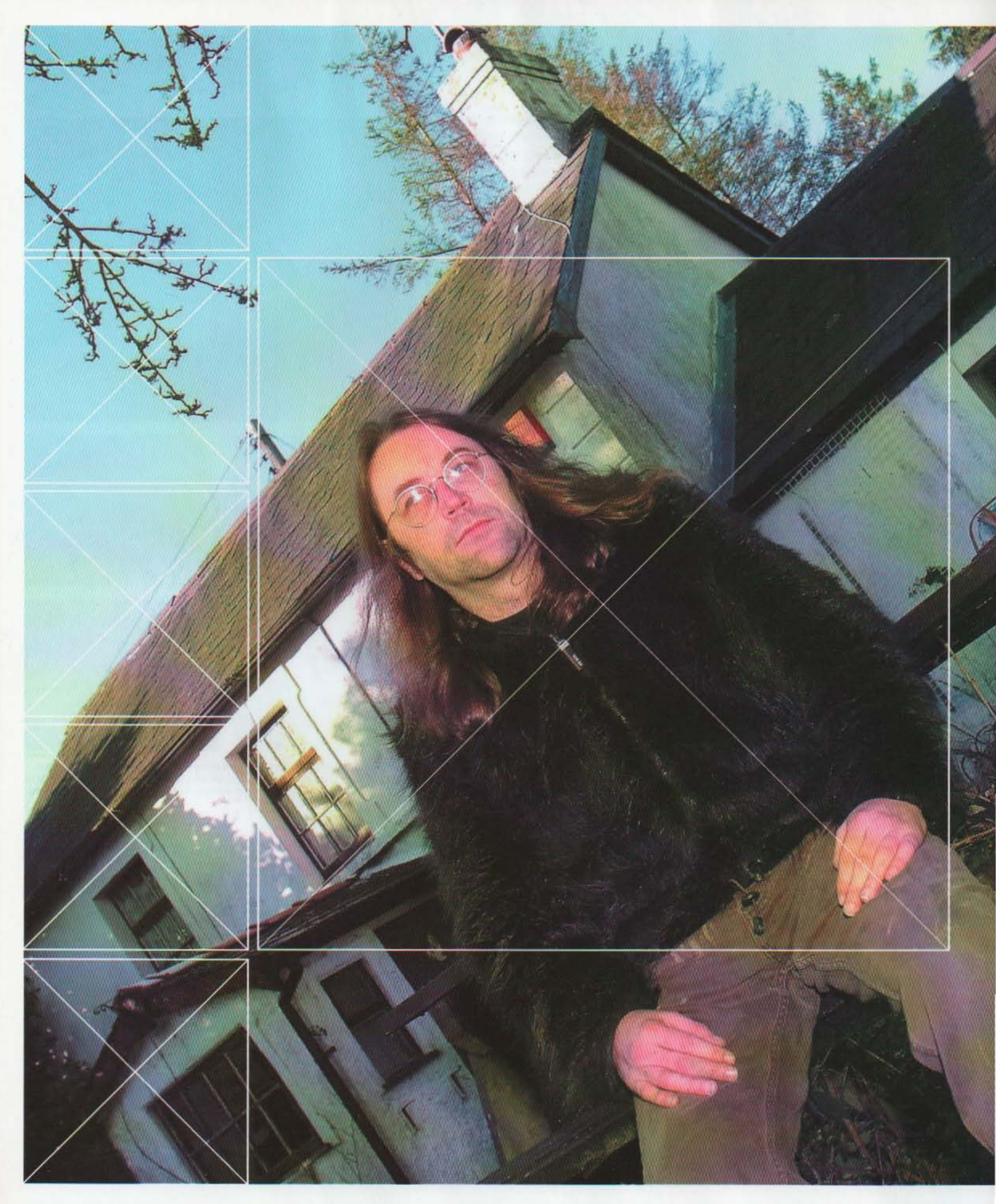








Top: *VLM-3* features a *Psychedelia* layer (itself a full version of the 1984 release), which can be controlled by one of up to four users. Llamasoft recently took *VLM-3* to London for a Warp Records party, where it went down a storm (read about it at the www.llamasoft.co.uk forums)





Photography: Martin Thompson



Inside…

Llamasoft

Sheep games, light synths, Atari's Panther… the head of Welsh codeshop Llamasoft (est. 1982) has been involved in all manner of oddness. Edge discovers how and why

Jeff Minter

is in his garden, taking some time out from *Unity* in order to talk about the Llamasoft story to date and run through some of his key releases. **Edge** wrapped up warm and asked the questions.

How did you form Llamasoft back in the '80s?

Well, when I first started making games it was for a handful of geeks at sixth-form college, and I never imagined that there would ever be a living to be made out of doing that. Then the home micro phenomenon started to happen, and suddenly lots of people had ZX81s and VICs, and a couple of companies expressed interest in some little games I'd written. I wrote a few games for them, but I wasn't happy with the way I was treated by those companies, so I decided to try doing it myself, calling the venture Llamasoft after one of my favourite beasties.

Initially I was in partnership with another bloke who wanted to handle the biz side of everything, but he also wanted to buy in and sell thirdparty games that were just awful. Back then you could get away with selling any old rubbish, because it was all so new that decent coders were very thin on the ground; but just because it was possible to do so didn't mean it was the right thing to do. I wanted Llamasoft only to sell stuff that I thought was good enough, and the sort of stuff he wanted to sell as Llamasoft product just wasn't up to that standard. In the end there was a fairly acrimonious split, and my mum took over the biz duties of Llamasoft and I concentrated on coding the games. I just wanted to sell games that I didn't think were awful and which I hoped people wouldn't be disappointed to part with a fiver for.

What was the most enjoyable period for you?

Oh, probably the early- to mid-'80s, the golden era of the VIC-20 and Commodore 64 – it was tremendous fun back then. Projects were small enough that you could complete them in a few weeks or months, so you could work on a lot of different games in the course of a year. The computer shows of that era were hard work but fun; it was really nice to have those opportunities to connect with the actual players of the games, hang out with them, play the games and drink lots of beer. Originality in game design was at a premium back then, so you could always be trying new ideas for play mechanics in your games. And I had a lovely work environment – an extension built on to my parents' house with all my machines laid out with plenty of room to work, and a nice big stereo and *Star Wars*, *Stargate* and *Tempest* coin-ops for my gaming pleasure during time off. It was a lovely time before the games biz became that much of a 'biz', and it seemed that there were just a bunch of enthusiasts doing what they loved doing and actually making a living at it too.

What do you think is the most important change in gaming since then?

Mainly the fact that hardware is getting so powerful that the old constraints that got between what the designer could imagine and what he could actually put on the screen are starting to fall away. No more 'only x moving objects on screen', or 'only 16 colours' or 'only four sound channels'. It's now getting very close to the point that if you can imagine it, you can implement it, and that's wonderful. All those ideas that have been filed away under 'if only that were possible' can finally be brought into the light – *Unity* is a case in point; the seeds for the project were planted back in 1994, but it was firmly on the back burner awaiting the day that hardware would be up to the job – and now it is. Lovely.

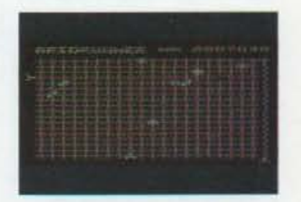
I think gaming online will also become a significant factor in changing the nature of games, but it'll take a while yet; broadband rollout, at least in the UK, is pitiful, and I can't see it really taking off until access is available to the majority of gamers.

And what were the most difficult times?

There was a period around 1989–1990 where things got financially pretty dire – we'd been buggering around wasting time and money working on the Konix system which had then gone tits-up, and selling games ourselves through conventional channels was becoming increasingly difficult as the games scene transformed itself into an 'industry'. It just seemed like all the fun was going out of it and I didn't know how I'd adapt to the environment that



***Defenda/Aggressor/Andes Attack* (VIC-20, 1982), (name varied by date and region but same game):**
"A fairly rubbish *Defender* clone with a massive gert ship, jerky scrolling and occasional bugs that would lead to unfair deaths and bits of mountain appearing in the sky. My first VIC game and, Goat help the nascent software biz back in those days, this was actually considered rather good in comparison to most of the tat that was out there, and brought me to the attention of Human Engineered Software, who published this and a few other games of mine on ROM out in the US."



***Gridrunner* (VIC-20, C64, Atari 8bit, 1982):**
"Written on the unexpanded VIC-20 in a week, actually a decent little shooty game in a Centipede styee, but a bit more sci-fi and a bit less cutesy than the coin-op. Introduced a couple of new features like the Pods and especially the X-Y Zapper. I think the X-Y Zapper was the first enemy that people actually started to hate me with a passion for."



Revenge of the Mutant Camels (C64, 1984):
"The one that most people remember, and the definitive game in the Camels series. Collision detection was a bit dodgy at times, but the game was fun and popular on the C64. Also one of the first games in the UK to use a 'turbo loader' so it would actually load faster than typing the hex in by hand, which is in fact quicker than using a Commodore tape deck at stock speeds. I remember it fondly because on the day it was launched we held a hi-score competition, and took the winner for a day trip to Egypt on Concorde to ride a camel round the Pyramids. Top laugh, that was."





Psychedelia (C64, VIC-20, C16, Spectrum, MSX, 1984):
"The first 'light synth'. Basically a dynamic pattern generator using a simple algorithm that fit into 1K (I actually released it for free as a hex listing). Looks well primitive now of course but surprisingly effective back then because we'd never seen anything like it. Deciding it would be nice to mix a bit of retro with the modern, there is a *Psychedelia* layer in *VLM-3*. You can shove it up front and have chunky retro pulsating llamas all over your nice rotatey neon plasma background, or stack it up and have it output onto textures, into feedback fields, or just have it interpreted as a grid of 3D translucent pulsating pyramids or some such interpretation which could only have been dreamed of back in the day with the aid of copious amounts of strong neuromodifiers. Lovely."





was emerging. That period concluded with one of the most rewarding episodes of my career, though – releasing *Llamatron* as shareware at a time when many people didn't know what shareware was, and certainly before anybody thought it would actually work. That release not only put Llamasoft back in the black, but also generated a tremendous amount of goodwill – I got hundreds of letters from people thanking me for releasing a decent game at a very reasonable price. Some people even paid more money than we asked for! It made me feel that there was still a place for a passionate individual in the games biz, despite the emerging New Order.

How did you get into bed with Atari?

Well, that goes right back to the early days of when the ST and Amiga came out. Commodore initially seemed more inclined to pursue a strategy of marketing the Amiga to business people, and they weren't very cooperative at all with people interested in making games for the new machine, whereas Atari were very helpful in getting me on to the ST. So I knew a lot of the guys at Atari UK, and when they decided to start up their own software label I ended up doing a couple of games for them.

Coincidentally an old school friend of mine had ended up working at Atari US – he'd previously worked at Perihelion on the Atari Transputer Workstation, and I guess that's where his involvement with Atari began. So when the Panther started to happen, I was well known at Atari UK, and there was at least one person at Atari US who also knew of me, so I was approached to work on that system and – as has often been my weakness – my love of getting onto new, cutting-edge hardware prevailed.

Panther didn't last long since it was already being eclipsed by the much more powerful Jaguar that was already in development within Atari. In the meanwhile Atari UK commissioned me to write a game for the new Falcon, and I wrote a nice little scrolly shooter for them – shame the market for the Falcon ended up being only a handful of geeks. Then along came the Jaguar, and Atari had a list of classic games to which they owned the rights, *Tempest* amongst them.

I remembered all the hours I'd spent in front of my own *Tempest* coin-op – I loved that game – and put my hand up for that title. That was a bit of a departure for me, because I'd always avoided taking on conversions before. But I could see the potential to do something rather more than a conversion with *Tempest* – the chance to bring a game that I loved into the present day, and to (respectfully) add some of my own flavour to it. It was a bit scary because all my experience at that time was with sprite-based 2D systems and *Tempest* would need polygons and simple 3D. But I'm glad I took the job.

Why have you spent so much time working as a one-man band?

It's just how I work best, I suppose. I haven't been *entirely* a one-man band for quite a while now, anyway – I've often worked with artists and musicians; *Tempest 2000* wouldn't have been half the game it is if the music hadn't been as excellent as it was. But I think that the way in which I develop a game is fairly well at odds with what is currently considered to be the 'accepted' way of doing things – the designers specifying everything in the game and then passing the specs to a hive of coders for implementation. I'm a coder *and* a designer, and although when I set out to make a game I have a fairly decent, broad idea of what I'm trying to do, I like the freedom of not being nailed down to a pre-existing, rigid design spec. I like to be able to have an idea, code something up, play around with it, refine it, reject the bits that don't feel right and refine the bits that do. It's a continuous interactive process and the whole game evolves from it. Sometimes an initially insignificant bit of noodling with the hardware will yield some technique or effect that ends up turning into a large part of the game's character or style – a case in point being when I was working on *Tempest* and wondered what would happen if you fed the previous screen into the rotate/scale mechanism and ended up discovering all the lovely feedback techniques which became a defining characteristic of that game's aesthetic. Such spontaneity is difficult to achieve under the currently prevalent development model.

What was your involvement with Atari's Panther?

I got involved fairly early on at the time when beta hardware was first available to developers. Panther was quite a nice machine, definitely superior to the Mega Drive that was current at the time, and better in some respects than the SNES, too. It was a pretty nice sprite-based system – you could manipulate the sprites on the fly for some interesting effects, and it had a nice Ensoniq sound chip, better than anything else out there on a console at the time. I was intending to do a space game with some *Star Raider*-y aspects – galactic maps, space shootouts – and some scrolly shooty sections when you went down to planets. There was going to be some strategic aspect in there too, influenced by Iain M Banks' 'Culture' novels, which I was quite heavily into at the time. I coded up various demos on the Panther – sprite warping, scrolly planet stuff (one of them had masses of leaping antelopes in it, if I remember correctly) and such, but before anything really started to come together into a game the plug got pulled on Panther because Jaguar was coming along very nicely and looked set to give Atari a system way more technically advanced than the SNES or Mega Drive with a good few months to get established before Sony would be ready with the PlayStation. This proved to be the case, but unfortunately there wasn't really enough good software available for the Jag during that period, and we all know what happened after that.

What about the Konix MultiSystem?

Ah, the KMS – it seemed interesting and new, so I invested in a development kit (in fact that was the occasion of my buying my first PC – an Elonex 286). I was doing a very spiffed-up version of *Attack of the Mutant Camels* on the system, and it was probably around 70 per cent complete when the whole Konix thing went tits-up. For its time the spec of the system wasn't bad – 256-colour display, nice little blitter, an x86 processor (if I recall correctly it was an 8086 at first and eventually ended up being a 386), and a little DSP thingie for doing your sound on. I never saw a final system actually packed into that funky housing with the mad handlebar controls that converted into a flight yoke, though. I think the chair peripheral was a little overambitious – it was a bit like a Sinclair C5 on a stand, and I remember it once blowing up while I was actually sitting in it, and I'm not exactly a blob of lard or anything.

I actually found a couple of minutes of video of that version of *Attack of the Mutant Camels* on some old videotape I was archiving to DVD the other day, and it was interesting to see it again; I'd thought it long since lost in the mists of time. It was shaping up to be quite a colourful, fun little shooter, and the realtime fractal music generation I had going on it actually didn't sound entirely horrible!

What do you feel about having worked on hardware that hasn't been a long-term proposition? There's no such thing as a Jeff Minter hex, is there?

Oh, God, am I ever fed up of that stupid 'curse of Yak' thing. It still gets trotted out to this day; it's time to let the old thing die, people. Most people only ever meant it as a joke, but there have been some who have said genuinely spiteful things – I remember seeing on Slashdot a while ago that some poisonous little geek who had evidently deluded himself that he was God's gift to coding was saying something like "Atari allowing Minter's badly written programs on to the Jaguar effectively sealed its fate." Whoever wrote that was so far and so firmly up himself as to completely miss the point that my "badly written" game ended up being the most popular Jaguar game ever, and was instrumental in giving the Jag some kind of credibility after a selection of spectacularly lacklustre launch titles.

"The KMS chair peripheral was a bit like a Sinclair C5 on a stand, and I remember it once blowing up while I was actually sitting in it, and I'm not exactly a blob of lard or anything"

I guess I've always enjoyed the challenge of working on new hardware, and perhaps let that guide my career decisions more than being 'sensibly commercial' as perhaps I 'should'. Working on brand-new systems as opposed to already-established ones is always going to be risky, but I simply found it to be more *fun*. I've gained experience on a wide range of different architectures by doing so, and that makes me more confident when it comes to learning new systems at any time when I need to. For all the Nuon experience was ultimately disappointing, it was also fantastically interesting – I was involved right at the start, before there was even a sniff of silicon, and through working with the engineers who were actually designing the chip I learned a lot about how processors actually work, down there at the hardware level. It was satisfying to see the chip finally come up for the first time, and to be able to see code that previously had only run on emulation actually

working on the real thing. Sure, things didn't work out in the end, but I spent a few years doing interesting work with good people, and I'm happy with the things that I did produce on that system.

I guess it does irk me when people imply that my involvement with a system was somehow instrumental in that system's failure; in fact my games are often the ones which people use to illustrate the potential that such systems could have achieved, had things worked out. If the systems have failed then it's been due to other factors which have nothing to do with me, and *despite* the fact that I have managed to coax decent games out of them, rather than *because* of it.

People still use Jags as dedicated *T2K* and *VLM* systems, and people are going out of their way to get hold of the last few Nuon machines – for *T3K* and *VLM-2*. The main reason people seek out these 'dead' systems is to get at the things that I made on them, and that's proof enough for me that I wasn't the cause of their demise. It *is* nice to be working on a system now upon which I can count on there being a target audience of more than three when the game is released, though.

What part of the game-creation process do you find the most enjoyable?

The beginning of a new project is always nice – all those new possibilities – and the end can be gruelling hard work, chasing deadlines and getting your head kicked in by pernickety testers, but it's also exhilarating to be on the home stretch, finally polishing and putting the finishing touches to a project that might have spanned years. But I think one of my favourite points in the evolution of a game is when you get your first real game environment set up, and you get your character moving within it and interacting with it properly, and then you throw in some enemies and for the first time actually get to play it. That's always very satisfying, and you know you're moving in the right direction when you find yourself getting addicted to your own game, and a quick run just to test something ends up turning into a bit of a protracted play session just because you're enjoying yourself.

How have you remained so dedicated to the cause for such a long time?

It's just what I do. I simply enjoy the work a great deal – it's exactly what I'd be doing as a hobby if I had to have a 'normal' job, and the fact that I can earn my living at it is an excellent thing. I love playing games, I love lightshows and funky graphics, and the fact that the tools with which one can create games and funky graphics are becoming more powerful with each passing year just makes it more exciting a field to work in as time goes by. Obviously like everyone I work to pay the mortgage and keep the sheepies in sheepie food, but I also work because I really, really enjoy what I'm doing.

Why do nearly all of your games involve shooting?

I've just always enjoyed shoot 'em up games, I suppose. I've always enjoyed that state of mind that a really well-balanced shooting game can put the player into – 'the zone', some call it. What I find appealing isn't the actual shooting of notional 'enemies' – my games have rarely had targets that resemble any living creature that much (apart from the occasional Mutant Camel, of course). In the best shooting games there's a lovely balance between the need to be aware of one's surroundings in the game and avoiding the threats contained therein, and the need to confront and eliminate those threats in order to progress. The player has to walk a fine line between risk and reward, and the more exhilarating the designer can make that walk, the more fun the game will be. A good, fast, challenging shoot 'em up game is a wonderful, visceral thrill. Not because the game is 'violent' – the kinds of game that I enjoy have enemies that are abstract; they're obstacles to progress to be removed rather than creatures to be killed. In fact I think if the targets were realistic and spewed blood I wouldn't enjoy the experience anywhere near as much as I do in abstract shooters. The thrill comes from having one's concentration and dexterity pushed to the utmost limits, and prevailing in the face of an onslaught that comes close to sensory overload.

Although I am known for shoot 'em up games, I have also had a parallel thread of development going on since 1984 in the form of the light synths – which are predicated upon the idea that there is enjoyment to be had from an interactive experience in which there is no shooting whatsoever, where in fact the only goal is a purely creative one – simply to enjoy creating interactive graphics displays in realtime, usually to the accompaniment of music. Similar things are only just now becoming mainstream in the shape of the audiovisualisation plugins for things like Winamp, but to my mind these miss the point, being passive devices which you simply stare at, going 'Ooh, that's pretty' for a while; it's nice at first, but ultimately as unsatisfying as a game that plays itself, which would grow boring no matter how lovely the graphics. Interactivity is the key, and the feeling of operating a lightsynth can be just as exhilarating and seductive as the 'zone' state experienced by those playing fast-paced shooters.

What I hope to achieve in *Unity* (hence the name) is to bring these two modes of interaction together into a satisfying whole. People are already well familiar with the concept of a shoot 'em up – so that's how I will draw people into the game; it will present as an abstract shooter, the kind of thing that people might expect from the bloke who made *T2K* and *T3K* cut loose on decent hardware. But what I intend to do is make it so that the act of playing the shooting game proficiently will also cause the player to perform actions which yield graphical displays that synchronise better with the music the better the player does in the game – eventually the 'shooting' aspect could become *creative* rather than destructive – rather than simply 'blowing things up' the player is doing something more akin to letting off fireworks in a display to accompany the music. I want to make it so that really excellent play is by its very nature *beautiful*. I'm hoping that players will start off playing a shooter and end up feeling like they are performing an instrument.

What are the most valuable lessons you've learned over the last 20 years?

Probably that there is no substitute for enthusiasm. You can be as technically competent as you like but if your heart isn't fully in the project you'll end up making a poor job of it. And that one shouldn't be daunted by the headlong rush of technology – it *is* possible to still be in touch and in the game even after 20 years of relentless Moore's Law!

Why do you have such a close relationship with the gaming community?

Basically I *am* a gamer, so I'm just like a lot of the gaming community – I am a part of the gaming community. That's a pretty broad church by now, and I realise there are a lot of gamers who prefer all kinds of different gaming genres to the area in which I work, and so inevitably there will be plenty who are indifferent – or in some cases even hostile – to the work that I do; but that has ever been the case; unless your name's Shigeru Miyamoto I don't think anyone can please all of the people all of the time.

Over the years – and especially recently, with the re-emergence of Llamasoft and the little community that has grown up around that – I have met many likeminded people, gamers and coders alike, and found good friendships there. Some of these people have followed me through the wilderness years from system to benighted system, ending up with a pile of obscure hardware which they use only to play my games. I can't help but feel close to these people, who have believed in me even at times when I've found it hard to believe in myself, and I know they will be as thrilled and excited when they hear about this project as I have been ever since we began putting it into place (it's been hell having to bite my tongue while it's all been being set up).

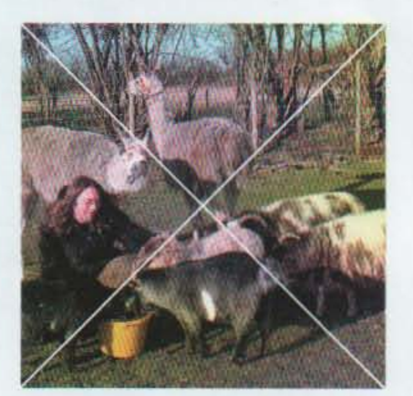
Some of these people have ended up going into the biz themselves – quite frequently I will encounter somebody who will cite as a major motivating factor towards learning to code and getting into the biz a fondness for my old Commodore games and memories of the enthusiastic rants about how much fun it all was in my old newsletter or in one of the occasional columns I wrote for magazines. It really makes me quite chuffed when that happens, at the idea that those silly games occasionally did something more than cause people to occupy chunks of their time chasing imaginary camels across low-rez landscapes.

I'll be doing my utmost to ensure that these people aren't disappointed when *Unity* is released. And I hope that the game will bring fresh blood into the fold, too.

Finally, furry animals: why?

I've just always been fond of furry animals, and it seemed natural enough to incorporate them into my games as characters. I just like things that are furry, and want to be around them!

"I simply enjoy the work a great deal – it's exactly what I'd be doing as a hobby if I had to have a 'normal' job, and the fact that I can earn my living at it is an excellent thing"







Mama Llama (C64, 1985):
"Pretty but unusual game which I got into a right strop about when 'Zzap!64' slagged it off. Looking back I realise that I was actually a bit up myself at that time; 'Zzap!64' had a point, and the game was just too bloody hard to learn how to play. There was a game in there if you persevered, but the controls were several steps beyond the wacky side of acceptable."

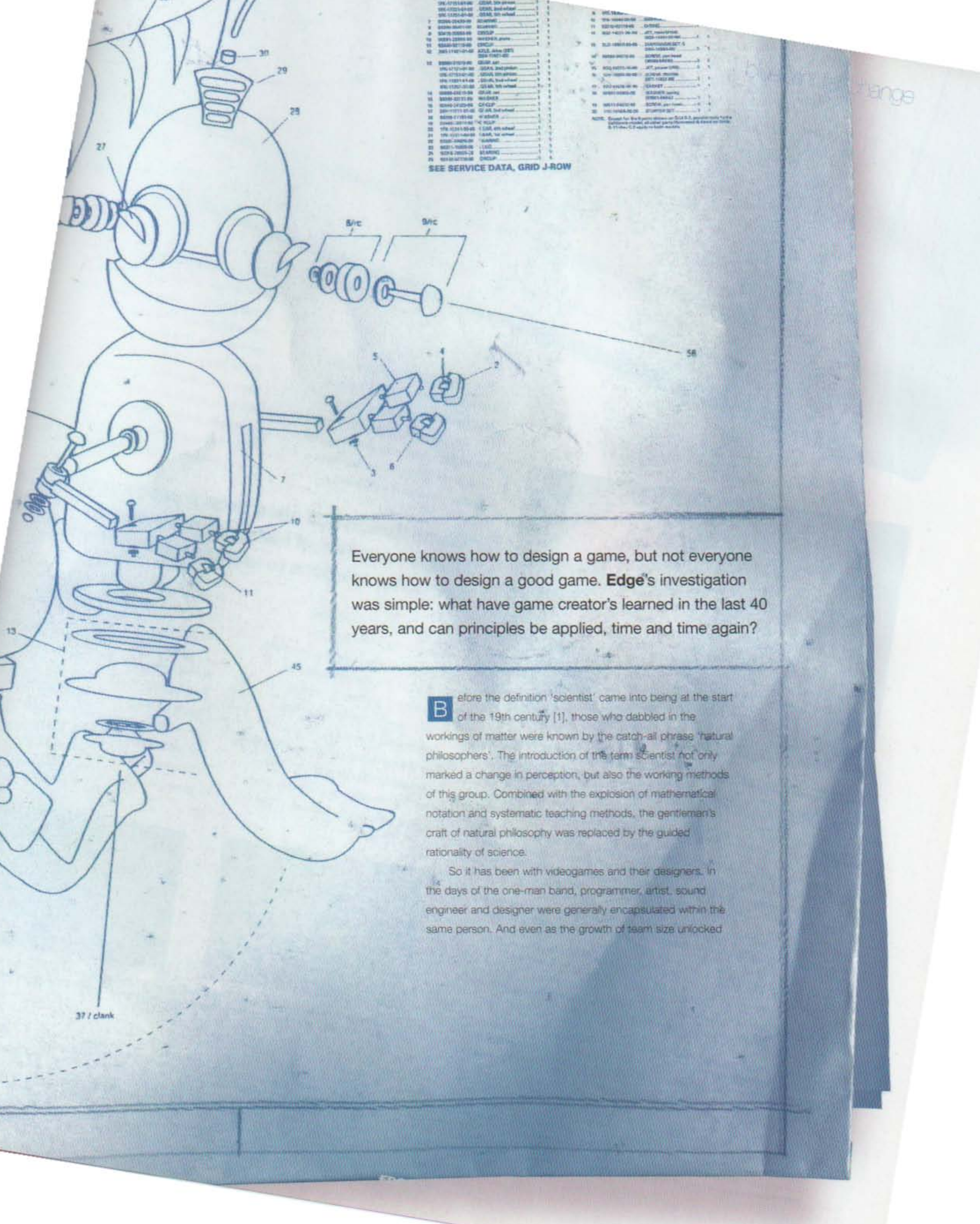




Tempest 2000 (Atari Jaguar, Sega Saturn, PC; bastardised version released as *Tempest* X_3 on the PlayStation, 1994):
"It's *Tempest 2000*, what can you say? The music was a hugely important part of the game, and I was fortunate enough to be working with a bunch of guys who turned out what I still consider to be some of the best tunes ever to come out of a cartridge-based game. The game, the effects and the music all just fit together so well that it started me thinking what might be possible if one were to concentrate on developing that fusion a lot further... an idea that I called *Unity*."

Blueprint for change





Everyone knows how to design a game, but not everyone knows how to design a good game. **Edge**'s investigation was simple: what have game creator's learned in the last 40 years, and can principles be applied, time and time again?

Before the definition 'scientist' came into being at the start of the 19th century [1], those who dabbled in the workings of matter were known by the catch-all phrase 'natural philosophers'. The introduction of the term scientist not only marked a change in perception, but also the working methods of this group. Combined with the explosion of mathematical notation and systematic teaching methods, the gentleman's craft of natural philosophy was replaced by the guided rationality of science.

So it has been with videogames and their designers. In the days of the one-man band, programmer, artist, sound engineer and designer were generally encapsulated within the same person. And even as the growth of team size unlocked



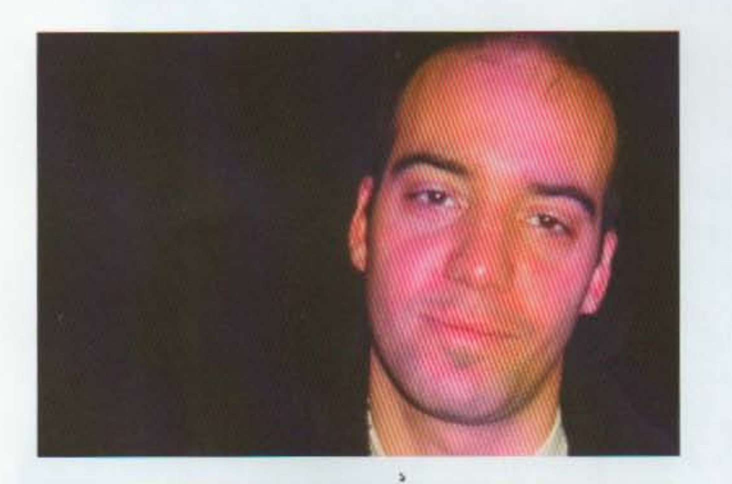
coder, artist and sound engineer into their respective positions, the role of designer has remained enigmatic. [2]

Traditionally a hat worn by one of the project's lead programmers, game design has often been something of a kludge – a series of inelegant but generally functional solutions to unforeseen occurrences. In such circumstances, good games were often the product of a combination of the experience of the team in working through likely problems before they occurred and sheer luck. [3]

The increasing complexity and cost of developing games during the mid- to late-'90s has effectively destroyed such ad hoc approaches, however. In their place, a variety of codified approaches to game design has emerged. The first formal attempt to define a framework for game design was Chris Crawford's seminal book, 'The Art of Computer Game Design'. [4] Although dated in terms of its relationship to technology, the book does raise some important issues for designers. [5] In particular, Crawford emphasises the need for a smooth learning curve, maintaining the illusion of winnability and thinking carefully about the relationship between opponents.

"Game design has often been something of a kludge – a series of inelegant but generally functional solutions to unforeseen occurrences"

Another scheme is **Doug Church**'s Formal Abstract Design Tools (FADT). [6] (See Formal Abstract Design Tools.) Operating at a high level, Church's main aim is to provide a common vocabulary for designers. As he points out, while advances in game design occur within genres, it has proved difficult to formalise



Formal Abstract Design Tools

Set out in 1999, Doug Church's FADT is an example of an open game design methodology. He attempts to reduce a game down to the core components a player experiences. Taking *Super Mario 64* as his case study, he uses it to derive design goals that can be applied in other types of games. There are three basic definitions used:

1. Intention – making an implementable plan of one's one creation in response to the current situation in the game world and one's understanding of the gameplay options.

2. Perceivable consequence – a clear reaction from the game world to the action of the player.

3. Story – the narrative thread, whether designer-driven or player-driven, that binds events together and drives the player forward towards completion of the game.

Using these three tools, Church then applies them to different game genres such as roleplaying games, sports games and beat 'em ups, thus deriving what elements can be applied from say an RPG's use of story within the context of a sports game.

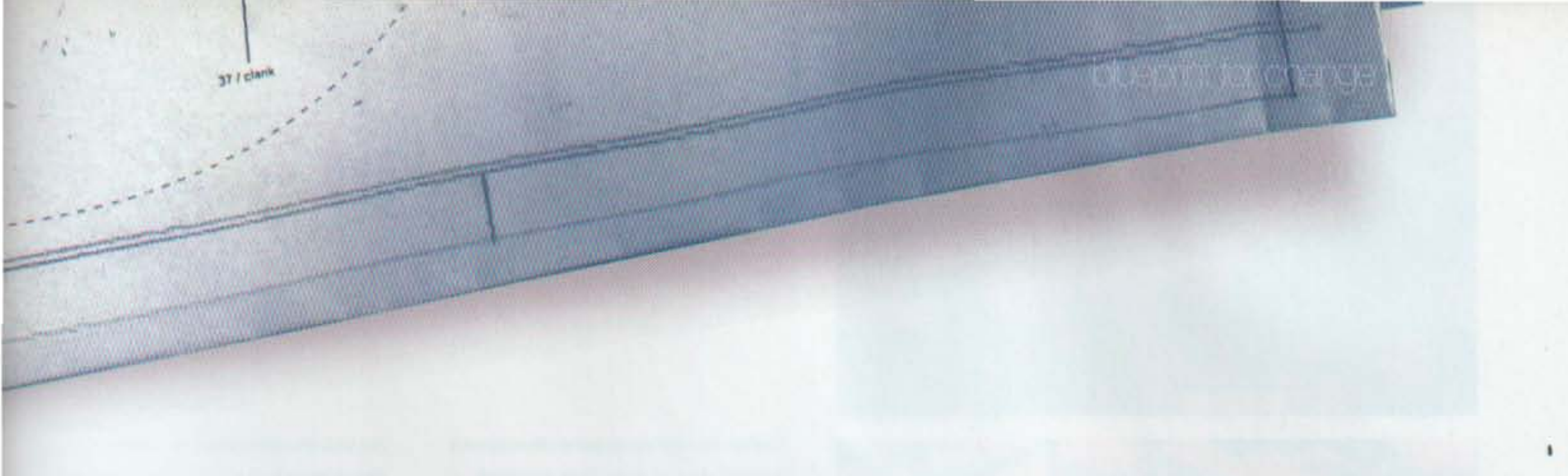




Visualisation is key to some of the most respected game developers: Shigeru Miyamoto famously uses Post-it notes, while Konami's Hideo Kojima uses Lego to help crystallise his game universe

[1] Historian and co-founder of British Association for the Advancement of Science, William Whewell invented the English word 'scientist' in 1833 at the request of the poet Coleridge. http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/whewell/
[2] In his August 1999 paper defining his Formal Abstract Design Tools approach, Doug Church says, "Design... is the least understood aspect of computer game creation." www.gamasutra.com/features/19990716/design_tools_01.htm

[3] One of the best examples of this situation was the Dundee-based studio DMA Design, which throughout the '90s was renowned for its innovative game design and its inability to complete games. DMA designer Gary Penn recalls, "You need some sort of structure in game development or you end up going nowhere or round in a big circle. Projects such as GTA managed to achieve escape velocity, but other products such as *TankTactics* went on and on and on."



them on a cross-genre basis. "We would be hard pressed to show many examples of how innovations in realtime strategy games have helped roleplaying games get better," he remarks. "In fact, we might have a hard time describing what could be shared." [7]

Assisted development

More recently, the majority of new systems have been the direct product of independent game design agencies such as Cerny Games and The Inspiracy. [8] These companies work with developers, particularly in the early stages of production, to plan fundamental aspects of a game.

One of the most high-profile current approaches is **Mark Cerny**'s Method (see The Cerny Method). Best defined as a production methodology derived from

The Cerny Method

As described in his GDCE 2002 keynote speech, Mark Cerny defined his method by deconstructing certain myths about game development.

myth 1: It is possible to plan and schedule the creation of your game – pre-production is a chaotic process. Developers should budget this process to cost $1m, as they will need to create successive prototypes to capture the essence of the game.

myth 2: Working productivity means not throwing things away – on average developers will have to create five complete prototypes, which means throwing away around 80 levels of work to come up with the game's first 20 level designs.

myth 3: Cutting-edge technology is important so build it first – this presupposes developers know where their game is going. Instead use prototyping technology combined with cutting-edge elements to get a feel for character, camera and control.

myth 4: Frequent project review is essential for good management – there should be no milestones during pre-production.

myth 5: Alpha is first playable – first playable should be just two levels which include all a game's global features. If the quality of the game doesn't overwhelm you at this stage, re-work. This is also the point to start focus testing.

myth 6: A cancelled project is a sign of bad management or a bad team – cancellation saves time and money. If a team can't create a publishable first playable they should stop.

myth 7: Game development requires a 100-page design document – it is deceptive and misleading to create such a document because this level of detail is not available until the game is finished.

myth 8: To create a hit game, listen to the consumer – focus testing will not generate novelty but is an important element of creating a hit game.

Nintendo's Redux

One UK developer with experience of Nintendo's working methods, is **Andy Satterthwaite**, director of Liverpool-based studio Curly Monster. "When we were developing *Wipeout 64* some people from Nintendo came over to Psygnosis," he recalls. "They explained Miyamoto works by designing a game to beta stage at which point it's scrapped and development starts again. The team may have generated something like 50 levels, by that stage, of which 20 may have worked so they can cut and paste from those working elements. In a way Nintendo ends up making a sequel to the initial game idea as its first release." This approach is also followed by developers such as Blizzard, who are sufficiently financial-stable to operate on the basis of 'a game is ready when we say it's ready.' An example is the million-selling *Warcraft III*, which started off as a fully 3D game but was extensively reworked, and delayed by 12 months, when it was decided it wasn't fun in its 3D incarnation. Plenty of developers, including the heavily Nintendo-influenced Rare, also prefer to employ game designers from the ranks of their quality assurance and testing staff. Having to endlessly play the mistakes of previous game designers provides an excellent introduction of what to do and what not to do.



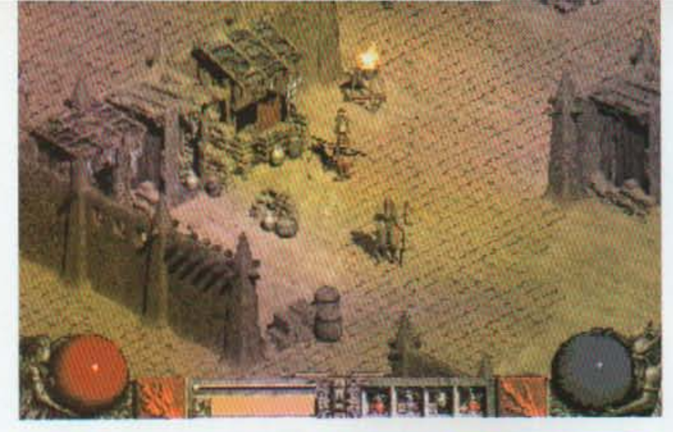
The most consistent game ever made, Shigeru Miyamoto and his team used Post-it notes to help smooth the design process for the seminal *Super Mario 64*





Blizzard's 'it's ready when it's ready' philosophy was once again demonstrated by *Warcraft III*'s prolonged development process, which saw the game fail to make the jump to a fully 3D engine. It still went on to sell millions of copies however

[4] Chris Crawford, 'The Art of Computer Game Design', 1982, now out of print but is available in electronic form from Washington State University, Vancouver at www.vancouver.wsu.edu/ fac/peabody/game book/Coverpage.html
[5] For example Crawford's Design Precepts for Computer Games are: go with the grain; don't transplant; design around the I/O; keep it clean; process more, store less; and maintain unity of the design effort (pp.41–48).
[6] Doug Church had worked as a designer at Looking Glass Studios on series such as *Thief*, *System Shock*, *Ultima Underworld* and *Flight Unlimited*. He is currently at Ion Storm working on *Deus Ex Invisible War* and *Thief 3*.
[7] www.gamasutra.com/features/19990716/design_tools_01.htm
[8] www.cernygames.com, www.theinspiracy.com





Rules of the 400

As an on-going scheme, any designer can submit a rule to the 400 Project as long as it follows five delinators. They are:

1. The rule should be stated as a concise and imperative statement, followed by a paragraph explaining it in more detail.
2. What is the rule's domain of application? For example is it a general rule for all games or a rule that applies only to games that use points and scoring?
3. What rules does this rule trump? What rules or principles does it take precedence over?
4. What rules trump this rule? What takes precedence over this rule?
5. Examples and counterexamples. How has this rule been used well in popular games? What examples are there of games where it should have been used? What games have suffered because it wasn't used?

An example of the one of the 400, as explained in the April 2002 issue of 'Game Developer' magazine is as follows:

The rule: Provide parallel challenges with mutual assistance – a designer should always provide players with several challenges, the accomplishment of one of which makes it easier to accomplish the others.
The rule's domain: This rule applies to all games.
Rules it trumps: None.
Rules it is trumped by: Provide clear short-term goals.
Examples: Both the *Civilisation* series and *Diablo II* are effective examples of this rule as there are rarely any bottlenecks to players' overall progress.

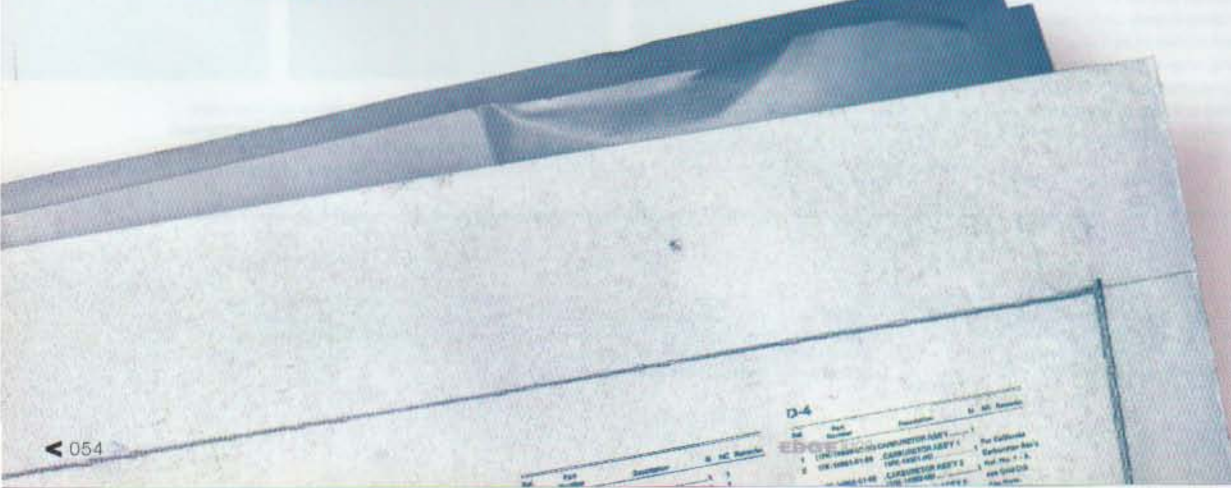
Cerny's experience of game development from his days at Atari, Sega and more recently with Sony developers Naughty Dog and Insomniac, it is designed to focus developer attention on ensuring that the core game idea is exciting to play as well as commercially viable before entering into fullscale production. [9] "Pre-production accounts for 80 per cent of mistakes," Cerny reckons. [10]

A key part of the Method recognises that developing games is not a linear process comparable to storyboarding and script writing for films or defining plot arc and characterisation for novels. Recognising it as an inherently emergent medium, Cerny's drive is to capture the vital essence of a game as early as possible, polish and refine it for as long as possible, and only then progress to a production schedule.

This is important because, as Cerny points out, there is often a temptation for developers to over-design their concepts at too early a stage of development. This creates problems down the line because developers are trying to define issues they do not fully understand.

"The 400 Project presupposes that there are roughly 400 rules game designers use, either consciously or intuitively, when creating games"

Whereas Method offers a production system, the 400 Project is an ongoing drive to provide a checklist of discreet game design rules (see Rules of the 400). Originated by Hal Barwood [11] at the 2000 Game Developers Conference [12] in a speech called '4 of the 400', it presupposes there are roughly 400 rules game designers use, either consciously or intuitively, when creating games. The 400 Project is currently overseen by freelance designer **Noah Falstein** and founder of The Inspiracy. [13] Falstein has around 30 rules provided by 15 or so designers, which he hopes to make available online, as well as working up into a book. Examples include allowing players to turn the game off, protecting the player's suspension of disbelief and providing short-term goals. "Both Hal and I are very pragmatic and have an aversion



The Denki process

It took Denki 46 weeks to develop the Game Boy Advance title *Go! Go! Beckham*. The process was broken down into four major phases. The development phase where prototyping and game concepts were explored took six weeks. This led to pre-production, where what Penn calls the game repertoire is constructed. This took 16 weeks. Production, which would be the main development phase for most developers took only 10 weeks and was followed by 14 weeks of post-production. "The idea is to adopt a placeholder mentality where it's easier to change something than make something," Penn explains. "You're always thinking about breadth not depth, which means you're trying to establish a full product at every stage."



The first version establishes its structure with placeholders. Components are built to be easily modified or replaced. The product can be used and the toys and events tested. It can then be exploited through the established foundation



The second version of the product incorporates the first pass of audio, video and play. The product's status is constantly visible and as the placeholders are replaced it's easy to see, hear and feel what still needs to be done

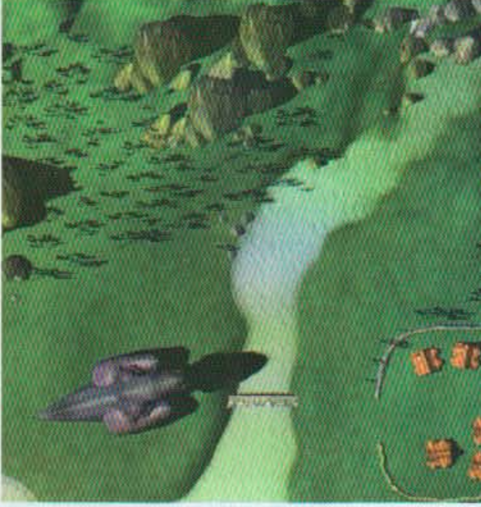


The third version of the whole product has detail added – mostly effects and ceremonies but also additional animation other little touches

to purely theoretical concepts," explains Falstein. "So far I've found the idea of codifying rules a useful tool."

It isn't only external designers who are coming up with techniques to aid the development of better games made smarter, though. There have always been examples of companies enforcing homegrown solutions on their teams. Perhaps the most notable is Shigeru Miyamoto's use of Post-it notes during the development of *Super Mario 64* and *Legend of Zelda*. [14] Using such scraps of paper, the interactions between intangible characters, game objects and environments could be physically investigated and played out on the walls of Nintendo's offices, enabling the team to pin down a coherent first-pass game design (see Nintendo's redux). Another example of novel design thinking includes Konami's *Metal Gear Solid* (see Building with blocks), while Valve's *Half-Life* and Lionhead's *Black & White*, respectively, demonstrate the power of focused team thinking and prototyping (see Best practices).





Not sure if it's going to work? Then get it into the game as soon as possible believes *Populous* creator Peter Molyneux

Best practices

Strange as it now seems, back in September 1997 *Half-Life* was a game in trouble – it just wasn't working out as fun as the developer had hoped. To turn it around, Valve created an internal design group called the Cabal. Consisting of a cross-section of the company, it became the powerhouse for refocusing the game and met four days a week, six hours a day for five months. Another method often used by developers in the early stages of game design is prototyping concepts with basic technology. A good example is Lionhead's *Black & White*. This process has been continued by Lionhead's satellite studios. The designers of Intrepid's *BC* use a simple test-interface to test game systems using a scripting language. "Peter Molyneux always says the best way of determining whether an idea is successful or not is simply to put it in the game as soon as you can," explains *BC* designer **Ben Cousins**.

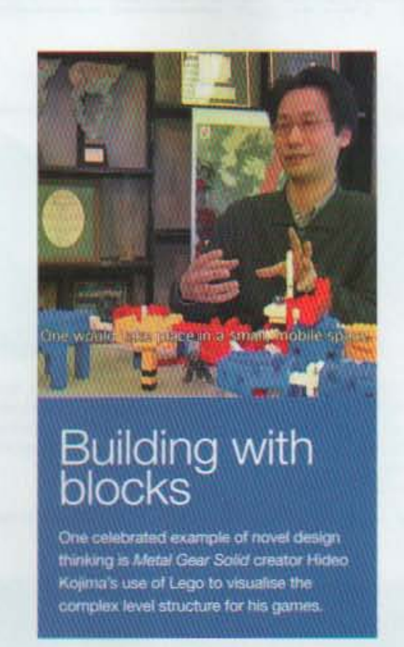
[9] Cerny's game credits include *Marble Madness* for Atari, *Sonic 2* for Sega, the *Crash Bandicoot* franchise and *Jak and Daxter* for Naughty Dog/Sony and the *Spyro the Dragon* franchise and *Ratchet & Clank* for Insomniac.
[10] Mark Cerny, game design keynote, Method, GDCE Wednesday August 28, 2002.
[11] Hal Barwood, legendary LucasArts developer, who has worked on the *Indiana Jones* and *Monkey Island* series of games as well as various 'Star Wars' projects.
[12] GDC is the annual conference for developers held in San Jose. Events also take place in Europe and Australia.
[13] Ex-LucasArts colleague Noah Falstein collaborated with Barwood in a 2002 GDC talk entitled 'More of the 400'. The project has gained a semi-formal status in Falstein's monthly column 'The 400' in 'Game Developer' magazine.

A more rigorous homegrown approach is that followed by Denki. [15] This self-styled digital-toy developer focuses its design work on 'product' not 'game'. "The reason we do this is game is only one aspect of product," explains product architect **Gary Penn**. [16] "They are almost conflicting roles; production requires work to be carried out with efficiency whereas designers always want to explore more possibilities." Denki solves this dichotomy by breaking down the development process into an explorative development phase, which is followed by preproduction, a short, efficient production phase and completed by a longer post-production or testing phase (see The Denki process).

Tools of the trade

As almost everyone agrees, however, none of these solutions are the panacea to the problems thrown up by modern game design. Mark Cerny notes that his Method only works for studios with the ability to shuffle team members from project to project as well as those with an especially close financial arrangement

"Production requires work to be carried out with efficiency whereas designers always want to explore more possibilities"



Building with blocks

One celebrated example of novel design thinking is *Metal Gear Solid* creator Hideo Kojima's use of Lego to visualise the complex level structure for his games.

Unforeseen circumstances



Rainbow Six

Red Storm/Take 2, PC, 1998

Squad-based games and narrow spaces are a dangerous combination as discovered in the original incarnation of the tactical shooter, particularly as there was no backward movement animation for troops in the crouch position. So players literally had to shoot their way through their own squad to get out of tight cul-de-sacs.



Deus Ex

Ion Storm/Eidos, PC, 2000

Two factors did it for *Deus Ex*. The first was the physical modelling of objects in the game, combined with the fact that the player didn't set off proximity mines they had planted, resulted in players using their mines as a climbing devices and completely destroying the careful constructed level boundaries.



Onimusha

Capcom, PS2, 2001

Respawning enemies whenever you enter rooms is fine as a game mechanic but in this case it undermined the whole levelling up process of weapons, which revolved around collecting the souls of killed enemies. The key flaw with *Onimusha* was that once cleared, only the weakest enemies would respawn in a room, thus providing the player a tedious but effective way of becoming very powerful.



Halo: Combat Evolved

Bungie/Microsoft, Xbox, 2001

One of the most controversial subjects for game designers is save points. If you allow the gamer to save anywhere there's a feeling the challenge of the game is destroyed by a constant save, die, load mechanism. the use of automatic save points in *Halo*, remove the freedom of the player to control their progress through the game, while combined with the two weapon-only rules on occasion punished players by saving their progress in extremely inconvenient circumstances.



Red Faction

Volition/THQ, PC, 2001

One of the golden rules of game design is maintaining a coherent universe. *Red Faction* did far worse than just breaking this rule as it was marketed on the basis of a powerful and novel gameplay mechanic – the ability to blow holes in walls. Unfortunately the game completely restricted the use of this skill to non-critical instances.

[14] The most famous game designer in the world, Shigeru Miyamoto started his career as an artist at Nintendo in 1977. He is the creator of game franchises such as *Donkey Kong*, *Mario* and *Legend of Zelda*.
[15] Set up in 2000, Denki consists of some of the programming, audio, art and design principals from DMA Design. It labels itself as a digital toy company and works on games for devices such as interactive TV platforms, mobile phones and other handhelds. Published games include *Denki Blocks!* and *Go! Go! Beckham! Adventure on Soccer Island*.
[16] Gary Penn was DMA Design's creative manager for three years, working on the *GTA* series and games such as *Wild Metal County* and *Body Harvest*. He now works at Denki.

with their publisher. Equally, both the 400 Project and FADT remain underdeveloped processes, while Denki is a small studio working on relatively well-defined projects. Perhaps more importantly, as Doug Church points out, developers do not make games out of tools, they use tools to make games, so even if these methods were complete, designers would still have to be able to select and use the correct tools for their particular project.

However, the fact that so much effort is being spent trying to work through these problems can only be a good thing for the industry. There may be a long way still to go but at least the process has begun. The result can only be a stronger development community and better games.

Case study

Collaboration at work: Sick Puppies' *Ghost Master*

One current example of a developer working with an external design agency is Sick Puppies' game *Ghost Master*. "With the scale of today's games it is essential to have a full-time designer or design team. However there's no requirement to have that design team in-house – in fact it can be more cost effective to employ them externally on a semi-regular basis," explains Sick Puppies' development director **Gregg Barnett**. Having previously worked with designer Chris Bateman (who since founded the agency International Hobo, on the game *Discworld Noir*), Barnett didn't hesitate getting him involved.

"I set out the initial design vision on paper and let Chris go off and flesh it out," Barnett explains. "Most importantly I could always control the vision. This is vital; the external design team must realise that they are providing a service to a client, not a crusade to get some design of their own made." Bateman agrees; "An 'us and them' mentality can be fatal in outsourcing, so we try to counter this by making it clear that we are completely subordinate to the developer."

"The only weakness, not having the designer in-house, can be turned into a strength," Barnett continues. "Keeping design and programming separate necessitates constantly updated game design documents. In fact this is the first game I have worked on where we managed to keep the design documents completely accurate to the game."







Elements of *Ghost Master* are being designed by an external agency. Though Gregg Barnett holds the vision there's a benefit to having an objective input at key points


SEGA
SEGA SATURN™
POWER
ACCESS
06



A Twist in the Tale

Sega's Saturn has scarcely been mentioned without the various prefixes 'ill-fated', 'misconceived' and even 'abortive'. But there has always been a contingent that has looked eastward, seen through the 3D fog and discovered Saturn's jewels of great worth. Although Sega still has cause for embarrassment, the Saturn system, in one sense, may have had the last laugh at the 32bit post mortem

Edge has always attracted the conspiracy theorists. At one time or another it has been accused by significant numbers of videogame consumers of being anti just about every system one cares to mention. But perhaps never more so than in the midst of the last console wars when there was a deluge of letters laying the blame for Saturn's failure in the west firmly at **Edge**'s fingertips. The truth is **Edge** lives for great videogames and, although logos often give an indication of what lies beneath, they rarely affect great gameplay one way or the other. **Edge** staff past and present, as with all self-respecting mature gamers, will proudly place and play the Saturn's finest coding next to the more popular machines. And as more gamers begin to mature, so interest in Sega's prodigal returns.

Just as the advent and subsequent popularity of photography inspired the Impressionist movement, so the 3D games revolution has inspired its defectors. These are the people and innovators for whom a mainstream stampede towards something new provides the perfect excuse and space to go and examine what's going on in the other direction.

Edge's view has scarcely changed since this appraisal in 1997. "The automatic assumption, that the advent of machines capable of shifting large quantities of polygons has marked the flatlining of the 2D advancement curve, is mistaken. In Japan, where 2D beat 'em ups are still enormously popular and sprite-based RPGs are forever in demand the situation is different; the Saturn is held in much higher regard than in Europe and the USA. Releases from Capcom, SNK and Treasure, among others, are eagerly awaited; many Japanese otaku would find the almost exclusive obsession western gamers have with 3D surprising, even nerdish." But obsess over the 3D revolution our corner of the globe did, and still does. The fact remains that while Saturn excelled in 2D visuals, she barely finished the polygonal race. So the Saturn comes to bear all the trademarks of an irresistibly collectable system for the enlightened western gameplay junkie. A huge popularity and user base in the east led to highly respected titles from highly respected thirdparty developers not to mention Sega's own prodigies. The failure to establish a lasting foothold in the west meant Sony-eyed publishers overlooked many of these titles.



Sega's Net link was the parent of the Dreamcast's online capabilities and enjoyed mild success in Japan. The world league table of *Radiant Silvergun* scores is sorely missed



Victor's Saturn is a desirable item for collectors. The Panasonic GameCube is a current example of a thirdparty manufacturer being granted hardware production rights



Virtua Fighter 2 should have been one of the system's key titles to combat the simpler *Tekken*. However, playing the game now demonstrates how the 32bit era 3D medium has unfavourably aged compared to many of the system's 2D titles

That, in Japan, the system became synonymous with classic 2D shooting titles, eminently playable for the monolingual player, has helped turn the console into something of an importer's dream. The classic combination of excellent titles, scarce availability and huge demand (many Saturn titles are just as collectable in Japan as on ebay) has helped drive prices up, and with good reason. But how did a company whose Mega Drive had failed to be a profit in its hometown yet ruled in America bear a child who was to succeed in Japan but spectacularly fail elsewhere?

"The classic combination of excellent titles, scarce availability and huge demand has helped drive prices up, and with good reason"

May 11, 1995 – 8.30am

Following a recent press release announcing the launch of Sega's new system on September 2, dubbed Saturn Saturday, Tom Kalinske, president of Sega gives a keynote presentation at E3. Building expectancy with talk of Sega's past arcade success Kalinske casually announces the dangerously high launch price of $399 (£249). To add silver lining to the pricing cloud he follows with the punch line: the console has already shipped. 30,000 systems that day had been distributed amongst just four US retailers: Toys 'R' Us, Babbages, Software Etc and Electronics Boutique. Sony, in a pattern that was to become familiar, trampled upon what should have been Sega's moment. Steve Race was called to stage by Sony president, Olaf Olaffson, to announce a PlayStation launch price of $299 (£186).

Sega had made several key errors in its supposed marketing brainwave. By limiting the distribution of systems to just four retailers for the first four months, some of the most loyal Sega outlets had been seemingly ignored. As a result more than one dropped Sega from its shelves altogether. The surprise launch was not backed up by triple-A software. Many publishers missed out on the all important launch period to establish their titles. The timing of the surprise launch was appalling too: the US summer videogames period



Light-sourcing and transparency were relatively difficult effects to achieve on the system for all but the most competent programmer (such as Treasure)



As always, collectable titles often depend as much on the developer's reputation as on the gameplay they offer. Raizing titles attract particular attention from the savvy fan



Treasure's *Silhouette Mirage* typifies the company's leftfield coding prowess. Needless to say the Saturn copes with the demands of this game far better than the PSone port



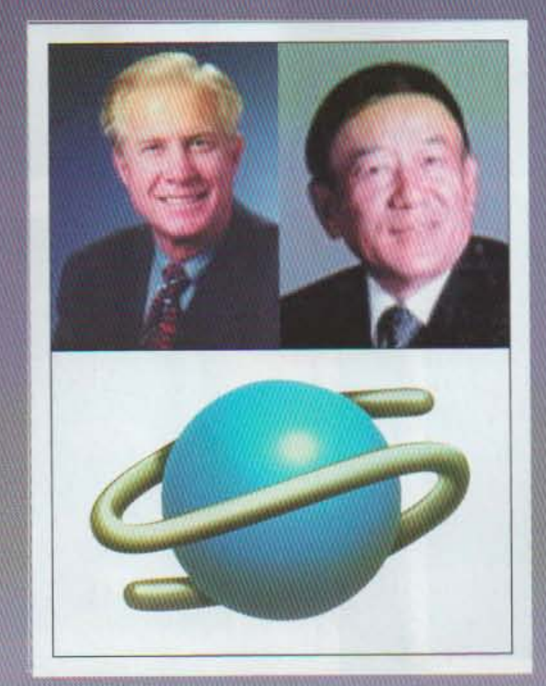
has always been notoriously dry. Finally the price point was too high for the intended market. The UK and European magazines looked on the Sega US camaraderie in horror and relayed all the painful details to an awaiting third territory public. That such elemental errors have been squarely blamed on Tom Kalinske and the US offices is not entirely fair. To explore the systematics behind the thinking we must go back to the extraordinarily successful Japanese launch.

November 22, 1994

The Japanese anticipation for Saturn was in stark contrast to the limited success its recent forefathers had enjoyed. Sega shipped 200,000 consoles at a huge price of ¥44,800 (£234), their most expensive hardware ever. But comprehensive pre-orders on stock at most stores had been completed months in advance so good sales were assured. As a result 120,000 pre-ordered and 50,000 off-the-shelf machines were sold on the first day. The Japanese press reported how, at one store, over 500 people had queued for two days. **Yu Suzuki**'s groundbreaking *Virtua Fighter* had wowed the arcade goers by demonstrating that there was more to the fighting genre than SNK and Capcom. That the system came bundled with no software at such a high price and yet the fact the expensive *Virtua Fighter* disk (¥7,800 – £41) sold at a ratio of nearly 1:1 with the console is testament to its importance.

In the run up to Christmas, Sega was selling an astonishing average of 17,241 machines per day. Sega's marketing men earned their money by holding off Saturn restocks until December 3, 1994, the day of the PlayStation launch. PlayStation's birth looked inconsequential by comparison and the Saturn outsold it by a ratio of 2:1. By Christmas Day Sega had sold 500,000 units, a full 60 per cent more than Sony had managed (to put this figure in perspective note that it took Sega until 1997 to shift 500,000 in the US). A more successful birth one can scarcely imagine.

At least, this is what we've always been led to believe. A few discerning American industry watchers noted how Sega was using the industry practice of counting the number of consoles sold to retailers as the basis for its purported launch success. Although there is nothing fundamentally wrong with this it did mean that only the very observant saw that Saturn, though maintaining excellent shelf space, was not finding its



Tom Kalinske and Hayao Nakayama: the two key men presiding over Saturn's fate are either scorned or pitied by the history books



Konami's *Parodius* franchise found itself heavily milked on the Saturn. Sexy is the most competent, complete with added titillati



SNK ported many of its best titles to the system including the last two *Samurai Shodown* games The box sets complete with extra RAM cart are the more desirable



The more violent sword-based fighter titles further evaded western release by featuring US-unfriendly red blood combined with traditional Japanese themes

way into quite as many homes as Sega would have us believe. So while Sony released figures demonstrating that as many as 97 per cent of the PlayStations that were being distributed to vendors were winding up in the living space of Japanese consumers, Sega hid the fact that 25 per cent of Saturns remained with the retailer. The reason behind this was simple: *Virtua Fighter* was the only triple-A game in the Saturn launch line-up for the Japanese buyer. The production delays *Panzer Dragoon* and *Daytona USA* were experiencing fostered consumer frustration which helped boost PlayStation sales. Other than helping Sony sales these delays screamed silently of one thing: hardware issues.

Crucially, Sega CEO, Hayao Nakayama overlooked these points. The fact so many systems had been sold was all that mattered to the desperate leader at this stage; that the money had come from retailers and not consumers was apparently of little consequence to him at this stage. Nakayama-san believed his own PR department's hype and this in turn resulted in the disastrous western launch. Gradually deteriorating relations with Tom Kalinske meant Nakayama-san and the executive board decided to take Sega US matters into eastern hands.

Before the release of Saturn, Sega had been suffering financial losses by supporting the myriad platforms it had on the western shelves: Mega Drive, GameGear, Nomad, Mega-CD, Mars (32X), Pico and 32X CD. While Kalinske had followed the traditional American axiom of spending your way into profit with the Mega Drive and 32X, Nakayama-san followed traditional conservative Japanese business practice and decided Kalinske's maverick tactics were to be overruled for the launch and development of the new machine. He ordered Kalinske to drop all the previous Sega hardware (at the time doing surprisingly well in the US but failing resolutely in Japan) and concentrate solely on Saturn. Crucially, with this gesture Japan was effectively neutering Kalinske and his previously successful US team. If Nakayama-san had heeded Kalinske's warning and kept Sega's 16bit software ventures going for one more year, leasing out hardware to the interested thirdparties, the potential earnings would have gone a long way towards making up the huge operating deficits that Saturn was already incurring on Sega. Instead, Nintendo got the 16bit



Boxart for the Pal releases, although undoubtedly a poor reflection of the Japanese originals is arguably superior to the heavy-handed American approach



Hitachi's Hi-Saturn came with hundreds of add-ons (see Directions in the stars). The compact screen peripheral is reminiscent of the PC Engine LT's extravagant design



Working Designs was lined up to release the bravest and best of Japanese titles before the company got fed up with Sega and left

22

market all to itself for another year and outsold both Sega and Sony by the end of 1996. The decision to cut off support for all systems other than Saturn was at once the best decision Nakayama-san could have made for the Japanese market and the worst decision he could have made for the west.

The Saturn's confusing maze of circuitry has been well documented but it is, ironically and indirectly, the way the system was built that alienated the western mainstream back in the day and yet now is attracting so many collectors. Debate still rages over whether Saturn was ever more than an exclusively 2D console with 3D afterthought.

The truth is, as ever, more complicated. Sega's plans for the machine began in 1992 albeit under the codename, GigaDrive. The system was given CD-Rom based storage and was specifically designed to better the 3DO, the only other 32bit console available at the time, by modelling itself on Sega's Model 1 arcade hardware. Like almost all of Sega's arcade and console systems, Hideki Sato and his Sega engineering teams developed GigaDrive. A number of working GigaDrive prototypes were built during 1993 and as the system reached the latter stages of testing the name was changed to Saturn. But this GigaDrive was a very different machine to the Saturn that launched two years later.

In December 1993 Sony announced the system specs of Ken Kutaragi's new PlayStation. Importantly, it alluded to 3D graphics that were as good as or better than anything that Sega's arcade offerings or high-end PCs had to offer boasting the ability to do both complex 2D and 3D processing.

Legend has it that when Nakayama-san obtained a copy of the design specs for Sony's new PlayStation and compared them to Sega's own Saturn, he called his entire R&D department to Sega headquarters for an emergency meeting. One Sega staff member at the meeting recalled Nakayama-san "was the maddest I have ever seen him." The original specifications of the Saturn were designed around the 16MHz NEC V60, a traditional CISC-type CPU that had been the first 32bit microprocessor widely available in Japan. In contrast, the PlayStation was built around a 33MHz MIPS R3000A, a faster and improved version of the R2000 RISC-type microprocessor that Silicon Graphics had been using in its SGI workstations for years. Sony had long been working with and manufacturing MIPS processors, so its engineers





Out of the *Bomberman* titles released in Japan only *Saturn Bomberman* has the tenplayer option. There was even a themed *Bomberman* multitap and controller released to coincide



Atlus was responsible for publishing many of the system's finest unknown treasures. ESP gamers and collectors alike can be thankful to these broad-minded publishers for helping to release definitive titles in dying genres from independent developers



The last in Technosoft's underrated *Thunder Force* series narrowly missed out on a western release from Working Designs

were fully aware of both what the R3000A could do and how it could do it. This knowledge allowed Sony's public relations department to hype the console's theoretical limits sky-high. As given, these PR figures (66m instructions per second with a theoretical maximum of 1.5m flat-shaded triangular polygons and 500,000 texture-mapped and lightsourced polygons per second) were more than double the maximum capability of Sega's vaunted Model 1 arcade board, and so dwarfed the prototype Saturn specs.

The result of Nakayama-san's emergency meeting was a commission to fix the Saturn so it could compete with Sony in less than a year. Hideki Sato handpicked a team of 27 Sega engineers, known as the 'Away Team', to immediately begin work on creating a redesigned Saturn. There was no time to commission new chips and parts and so Sega had to look to existing components. It was this set of circumstances that led to the team opting for the dual processor. By using the two cheaper chips the team intended to quickly attain 32bit power in an affordable manner. Strangely Nakayama-san himself chose the parallel Hitachi SH-2s, it later being rumoured this was a favour to an old golfing buddy.

Rarely has a pair of processors been the subject of so much playground discussion as the Saturn's. Importantly, these choices were in direct opposition to the wishes of Kalinske who had already submitted a proposal. They had contacted Silicon Graphics, one of the companies behind the PlayStation's 3D graphics capabilities, and had come up with an alternative: a single-chip simplistic design that they were convinced could compete with Sony. To their surprise, Nakayama-san overruled them in favour of the Away Team.

Such technobabble may sit at odds in a feature concerning the Saturn's collectability, but the way the chips work is of utmost importance to understanding why Saturn was so good at 2D and mostly failed with 3D. The VDP 1 chip is primarily responsible for sprite generation – the building blocks of 2D graphic creation. Polygon generation could only be accomplished through manipulation of the sprite engine. The VDP 2 serves as the Saturn's background processor. Certain special effects such as texture transparency and playfield rotation are handled here. Where the Saturn does have trouble, is in the generation of these effects in a 3D environment.



Sega's recent port of the first three *Phantasy Star* titles to the Game Boy Advance has highlighted the fact that this could have been a success in the west



Saturn was so successful in its home territory that new gems are still being discovered by the import hungry. *Princess Crown* is a fine example



One wonders quite which thesaurus Reiko Kodama and the *Phantasy Star* art team were using for the *Collection* release



Everything should have been better for this port of the PlayStation classic. Even though Konami's commissioning of one of its less experienced teams may have resulted in this inferior offering, the game still demands high prices for the extras it holds

Along with lightsourcing, 3D transparency must be generated through software code. This is not a problem if the developer is familiar with writing Saturn software or was provided with the necessary programming libraries. But while Sega was one of the few players outside of academia who had experience with working with parallel processing this was not so for the rest of the videogame industry.

Many developers would eventually content themselves with mainly using one of the chips, limiting the system resources and gaming possibilities. **Steve Palmer**, creator of *NBA Jam*, summed up the juxtaposition between the Sega and Sony approach to the developers. "To learn to program the Saturn was to learn the machine. To learn to program the PlayStation was to learn C. Learning C is much easier than learning the hardware of a new machine, and with the Saturn, there was a lot of hardware to learn. The same would have been true of the PlayStation, except you didn't need to learn how to talk to the [hardware]. The libraries took care of that. Sega's approach was to release hardware documentation for every aspect of the Saturn. That was understandable – it was what programmers were used to, but the industry had changed: the 'big boys' had moved in and time is money."

Yu Suzuki famously commented, "One very fast central processor would be preferable. I don't think that all programmers have the ability to program two CPUs – most can only get about one-and-a-half times the speed you can get from one SH-2. I think only one out of 100 programmers is good enough to get that kind of speed out of the Saturn."

So in terms of western developers, western 3D consumer tastes and western retailers, the Saturn was dead in the water before the end of the first year. Only no one knew it yet.

E3, May 18, 1996

Sony now commanded 80 per cent of the new console market. Sega spokeswoman Angela Edwards was carrying signs trumpeting Sega's $300 (£187) price adjustment for the Saturn when a Sony employee approached her. He looked at her sign and sighed, "You are pathetic." That day Sony executive vice president Jim Whims announced that the price of the PlayStation would be reduced to a mere $200 (£124). Sega could absolutely not afford to match that price but had no choice. Twelve days later Sega of America officially sacked



Capcom plodded on releasing titles long after the Saturn had stopped breathing. The fact that these titles are often stunning and can easily hold a candle to the later DC ports is testament to both Capcom's in-house programming skills and Saturn's raw underhood power



The Saturn port is the one to go for if Neo-Geo prices make your bank manager chuckle. Slick loading and accurate sprite rendition make this the CD-based version to buy



Like the Dreamcast after it, Sega continued to release special edition versions of the hardware right up to the end. The smoky 'This is Cool' Saturn is particularly attractive

the marketing firm of Goodby, Berlin, and Silverstein – creators of Sega's famous 'Sega scream' ad campaign – on the direct orders of Sega CEO Hayao Nakayama. Little over a month after that, on July 15, Sega of America president Tom Kalinske officially tendered his resignation. When company founder David Rosen followed suit the next day in support of Kalinske, resigning his long-time chairmanship of Sega of America, Nakayama-san resigned his own position as co-chairman of Sega of America. The heads of the company had come crashing down and the wreckage had crushed the Saturn everywhere but in its homeland.

The significance of this abbreviated history to the collector's scene is that it demonstrates how the conditions were laid for the system to attract such interest today. Nakayama-san's abandonment of all the 16bit machines in Japan in late 1994 allowed the full resources of the company to be ploughed into Saturn ensuring its silver medal in the hardware race in Japan. This, in turn, meant the system played host to a slew of excellent titles late in its life which may not have come to be had Sega Japan spread itself too thinly. The dedicated 2D architecture meant the shoot 'em up genre was advanced long after it had gone out of fashion on other systems. In terms of the west, the neutering of Kalinske and puppetry of the Japanese executives resulted in the stillbirth of the machine in the face of Sony – meaning all the late great titles never made the journey from the land of the rising sun. All the conditions for Saturn's collectability in current times were being laid eight years ago.

Lee Mallabar, 27, has been working as a buyer for videogameimports.com for nearly 12 years now and has been collecting Saturn since its Japanese launch. As Saturn is one of the store's most popular systems Mallabar is well placed to view its market trends. **Edge** picks his brains regarding the theory behind the collecting twist in the Saturn's tale. "I have been collecting Saturn as long as any man. Travelling to Japan for the Saturn's launch in an attempt to buy as many units as possible was a fantastic experience I'll never forget. Just seeing *Virtua Fighter* running on the screens outside the Japanese stores was very exciting. There was such a buzz about the system and it's great to feel some of that fervency surrounding the machine return in recent times, albeit in the collecting form. There's currently a lack of



Psikyo's 32bit shoot 'em up games are almost invariably of the horizontal scrolling variety providing respite from the multitude of vertical arcade ports on the Saturn. The bonus disk included with *Sengoku Blade* features a welcome inventory of all its games ever released



The level of nudity in the hentai titles is expressed in the colour rating system. *The Throbbing Nightmare* hits the yellow 'danger' level



Something of a holy grail for Saturn hardware collectors, this in-car curio can fetch prices in the thousands when it occasionally surfaces (see Directions in the stars)

Directions in the stars

Sega licensed the Saturn specifications out to the principal component manufacturers so they could build their own clones of the Saturn hardware. Japanese licences were given to JVC Victor, Hitachi and Yamaha. This was not the first time Sega used this marketing model, as clones of the Mega Drive and Mega-CD hardware were also produced previously.

Other than the original grey Japanese Saturn there were: two versions of the white Saturn; the Hi-Saturn (Hitachi manufactured with an MPEG card added); two versions of the V-Saturn (JVC-Victor manufactured); the Skeleton Saturn (with 'This is cool' logo – 50,000 produced) and the Blue Skeleton Saturn (released on March 25, 1999 in a promotional tie-in with ASCII's *Derby Stallion* Saturn game – 20,000 produced).

The Rolls Royce of the Saturn hardware versions is undoubtedly the Hi-Saturn Navi (left). Also made by Hitachi, this model had a low, square and completely flat profile, and came with an add-on LCD monitor. What made the system so interesting was that it included a modem and a GPS receiver for use as a navigation device in luxury cars through a joint deal with Nissan. The system is as rare and desirable as they come.

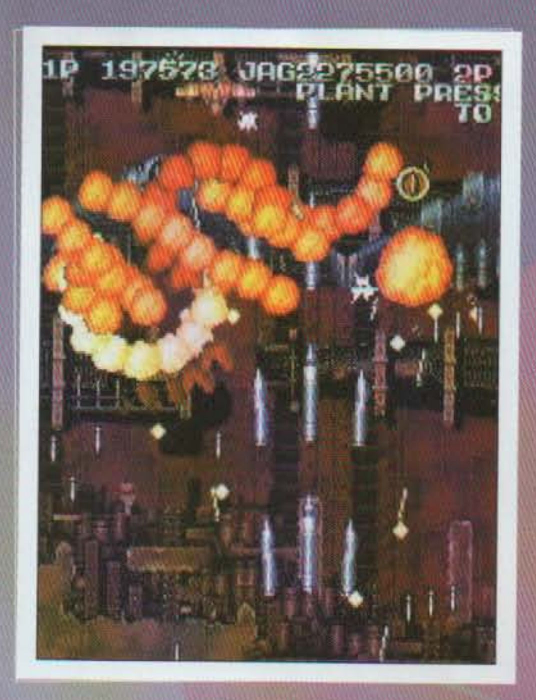
old-style genre games. People still want and love these games, even if they seem to be hiding in the closet. By word of mouth, through the Internet, they begin to learn about the Saturn, and slowly realise it wasn't the pathetic loser they thought it was at the time. Saturn, in my opinion, has now become popular because of the shooters. This genre doesn't get represented anywhere near as frequently these days.

"Towards the end of the Saturn's life shooters were becoming an exception on the release schedule, whereas for many years before this period, it was probably the most supported genre. There are a lot of people out there who love 2D shooters and always will. Shooters are loved because they are so pure, and gamers can lose themselves in simple gameplay, which relies so much on reflexes.

"As to why Saturn is the weapon of choice for collectors looking for these genres, I'd say that generally it offers lots of different styles of retrogaming in its most advanced and impressive form. In that sense, as a console, it really only has the Neo-Geo as a competitor. PSone, Dreamcast and PS2 offer tastes of all of this stuff, but you can get it all in abundance with the Saturn. By that I'm not putting down older consoles like the PC Engine and Mega Drive, but shooters on Saturn usually look better, possibly sound better, and often involve more intricate and intense gameplay. The intensity of *Battle Garegga*, for instance, could never have been produced on the 16bit systems."

"There's currently a lack of old-style genre games. People still want and love these games, even if they seem to be hiding in the closet"

There has been a noticeable rise in the sale of import Saturn titles over the last three years. **Edge** wonders if this is still on the rise. "To be honest I think it peaked somewhere over the last 12 months. Lots of people got very obsessive collecting Saturn games over the last few years, and the fact that specialist retailers and, obviously ebay, offered such a huge range of titles, meant that people with a lot of money have been able to actually finish their collections. Of course,

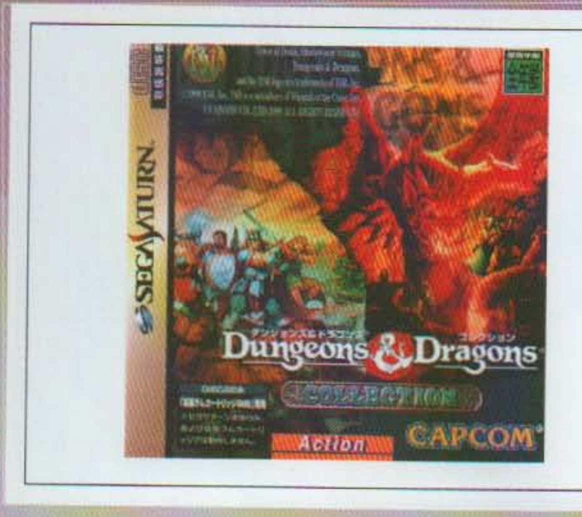




The demo of *Battle Garegga* supplied on the re-release of *Soukyugurentai* enticed many to hunt down this lovely title



Taromaru is possibly the rarest title on the system. Next to *Stellar Assault* it demands the most consistently high prices – mostly because there are only 5,000 copies to go around



D&D's monetary worth perhaps obscures its actual value in terms of gameplay. Even at the time of release these ports felt outdated and the loading times are unforgivable

there are always new people coming into the scene, but not quite as many as there were 12 months ago.

"Having said that, the winter period is traditionally slow for retrogames as there are normally so many new titles being released for the current systems. In terms of whether the bottom is set to fall out, personally, I don't see why the prices won't steadily rise over the years. Because of ebay, some prices have risen faster than they otherwise would have. Right now, the demand is lower than usual and there's been over supply pretty much all year, but when the dust settles, the system will still be collectable and in demand".

Edge ponders whether there is a discrepancy between the title that is most often asked for and the title that is actually hardest for a collector to obtain. "Traditionally, and predictably, I am asked to supply *Radiant Silvergun* most often. In 2001, we sold over 50 copies of that game which, at the price of a GameCube, is no mean feat. Demand for that title has slowed now, mainly because of the demand over the last couple of years and the intensity of eBay auctions has pushed up the price. Even some Japanese retail stores are charging 50–100 per cent more for the game now than they were two years ago, which means that we have to charge more for it that we used to, and so sales have slowed down.

"In terms of the hardest to locate title, probably *Shinrei Jusatsushi Taromaru*, a game Time Warner released just before it closed its Japanese operation. It was directed by one of the Treasure staff so holds interest for many collectors. I think there were only 5,000 copies produced which naturally drives up prices. In my opinion there are far rarer titles such as *Stellar Assault*. The difference is that *Taromaru* has a reputation and so is sought after, while hardly anybody owns *Stellar*, so the word doesn't get spread.

"High prices are based on the simplest of value principles: supply and demand. If *Taromaru* had sold a million copies in Japan, it would be selling for under £20 now. In the same way, if *Panzer Dragoon Zwei* had only sold 5,000 copies, it would be worth over £100 today. I'd say *Radiant* and *Taromaru* are two of the titles we make the least profit on. They're so hard to get in Japan now, and with *Radiant* especially, they can sell in five minutes of being on a store shelf in Japan. Even if one only makes £10 on a sought after game like that it helps to make any seller look good."



The DC and GC releases of *Ikaruga* have done little to dampen the soaring prices or eminent enjoyability of *Radiant Silvergun*. Still the traditionalist's weapon of choice



Stellar Assault is one Saturn title that is as collectable in its homeland as it is abroad. Released in extremely limited quantities you can expect this game to bring out all the snipers if and when it finds its way onto eBay

Edge wonders where the retailers see the Saturn collector's niche in five years' time. "Well there won't be the frenzy like there has been over the last year or so, but overall I see it being similar to the way it is now. However, Japan is going to run dry of these in-demand games one day, so it's inevitable the average prices will have risen significantly by then. Unlike the Neo-Geo scene which is highly evolved in terms of western collector knowledge the Saturn has so many titles that it's hard to know what had the smallest production run or what is most valuable. The scene is still discovering games we've never seen before and so there is a lot to attract the curious."

The last official figures regarding the market performance of the Sega Saturn were released on September 10, 1998. Sega had sold approximately 10m consoles worldwide – about 1m in Europe, about 2m in North America, and the rest in Japan and Asia. Sega Europe suffered the least casualties in the aftermath, but Saturn's roots were the shallowest here. From 1993 (year of greatest profit) to 1997, Sega had gone from a net yearly profit of about $230m (£143m) to a net loss of about $389m (£242m). In **E**51 **Edge** prophetically summed things up for today. "The Saturn, casualty of the second-generation 32bit console war, is neither 3DO or Jaguar. It boasts arcade conversions that Namco rivals but rarely beats, classy RPGs and support from offbeat developers such as Treasure. It is, in short, the hardcore gamer's machine of the '90s. In this sense, Sega's failure is also its greatest triumph."

Continued >

What they think now

"You can have the best games in the world, you can have the best machine on the market, but unless you roll the two together with solid marketing and add to it a wide range of creative software from a varied mix of talented developers, you won't succeed."

Mark Hartley, former marketing director of Sega Europe

"I think the key to success in videogames nowadays is how quickly and firmly you form the business model and how the manufacturer is obliged to launch hardware at the right price, with the right timing, and with the right marketing. This encourages the thirdparty community to develop games for the platform. Thirdparty games follow after the initial launch. Then, we must appeal to the right user, and we also must review the price point of the hardware. We also need games to appeal to the right users and various publishers, and then also we need an overall marketing strategy. I think Sega didn't make this business model in the right way. This is the reason we've been behind our competitors... I think they thought our business model was not attractive enough to them for making a huge investment... maybe because of our huge success with 16bit machines, we paid less attention to the importance of the reliance on thirdparty publishers."

Kazutoshi Miyake,
former chief operating officer of Sega Europe

"We have lost some credibility among our Saturn users – even in Japan – because they have seen the PlayStation become the dominant force [in the worldwide videogame market]. In the past, I think that Sega has maybe been arrogant."

Sega CEO Shoichiro Irimajiri
successor to Nakayama-san

"I really think Saturn's failure was a combination of things. Bad timing, high price, launch software that didn't sell the hardware, no Sonic at launch, limited retail distribution, and [the] 32X didn't help out our position at retail, with the consumer or with the developer/publisher community. I don't think any one thing was the issue – it was the layering effect that these things had on the business. Remember, no launch has ever been perfect for anyone. You can hide a lot of mistakes by overcompensating in different areas."

Bernie Stolar, successor to Tom Kalinske

"The bottom line is that Sega was too loose with its money. No matter what I told Nakayama-san, he just brushed me off, saying, 'Okawa-san, you do not know the gaming business.' What I do know is business. [Nakayama-san] may have known games, but he did not know business.

"As a result, Sega kept going after profit/loss and did not consider its balance sheets. They did not think about cash flow at all. The business management [of Sega] left me totally dumbfounded. One of the basics of business is that you hand over the product to buyers and receive money in return. Unfortunately, our management personnel did not even seem to know this basic fact. That is why their attitude was so nonchalant, even if Sega was accumulating debt. They had no concept of production schedules or product management on their minds. They thought neither of balance sheets nor cash flow. They knew a lot about games, but they didn't know how to run the company."

Sega chairman Isao Okawa

"Actually this may sound unfair, but I do blame **Edge** in part: I feel that its constant talk of Saturn's apparent underpower filtered down to other supposedly lesser-informed media. But I don't expect to see that view in this feature."

Lee Mallabar, buyer, videogameimports.com

The shoot 'em ups

The genre the Saturn is most famous for among collectors. Many of the greatest arcade shooters appeared on the Saturn-based Titan (ST-V) arcade board so the ports just kept coming, ensuring the system is the place to go for all 2D shooter fans. Incidentally Working Designs was originally due to release some of the best games in the west. Managing director **Victor Ireland**, explains, "*Soukyugurentai*, *Thunder Force 5*, *Thunder Force Gold Pack 1&2*, *Hyper Duel*, *Blast Wind* and *Sengoku Blade* were all licensed and ready to be announced when it became obvious that Mr Stolar and Co. were out to trash the Saturn. We canned all deals." In truth there are many more titles we could mention here, but here are ten of the finest...

Battle Garegga





Japanese version only: £70–90
Original release: 26/02/98
Developer/Publisher: Raizing/ Electronic Arts

Recently has become one of the most popular examples of the genre, especially for the relative newcomer who already owns *Radiant Silvergun*. Expect its value to steadily rise.

Radiant Silvergun





Japanese version only: £100–150
Original release: 23/07/98
Developer/Publisher: Treasure/ESP

The legendary progressive shooter. A sprawling game that showcases the best Saturn programming ever seen. Perhaps the import title most wanted by the most people.

Kingdom Grandprix



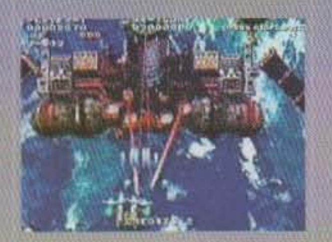


Japanese version only: £45–60
Original release: 14/06/96
Developer/Publisher: Raizing

Stunning and rare vertical shooting/racing hybrid. That Raizing is the developer increases the desirability to the knowledgeable.

Soukyugurentai





Japanese version only: £40–55
Original release: 07/02/97
Developer/Publisher: Victor/Electronic Arts

Another rising star this shooter is more conventional in its space thematic.

Dodonpachi





Japanese version only: £40–55
Original release: 18/09/97
Developer/Publisher: Cave/Atlus

Sequel to Cave's Arcade to Saturn 1996 shooter *Donpachi*. With huge power-ups and frantic onscreen action, the game is highly esteemed by many connoisseurs.

Thunder Force V



Japanese version only: £35–45
Original release: 11/07/97
Developer/Publisher: Technosoft

Technosoft has always had a vociferous following with the *Thunder Force* series. The special pack version is especially desirable.

Strikers 1945 Part 2





Japanese version only: £50–70
Original release: 10/22/98
Developer/Publisher: Psikyo/Atlus

The arcade stalwart *Strikers* series reaches its zenith with this Saturn port. A lovely item for the many Psikyo collectors and players alike.

Sengoku Blade





Japanese version only: £70–100
Original release: 22/11/96
Developer/Publisher: Psikyo/Atlus

Using the same engine as *Strikers 1945 Part 2* this game is the sequel to the arcade exclusive *Sengoku Ace* (1993).

Sexy Parodius





Japanese version only: £45–60
Original release: 01/11/96
Developer/Publisher: Konami

Konami's very own parody of *Gradius* reaches its zenith in this beautifully animated iteration.

Stellar Assault SS





Japanese version only: £140–180
Original release: 26/02/98
Developer/Publisher: Sims

An update of the 3D 32X *Shadow Squadron* and perhaps the rarest of all the Japanese shooters.

The fighters

Capcom's long-standing support of the Saturn ensured some of the greatest ports of the '90s found their way onto the system – albeit often requiring the 4Mb RAM upgrade cart. If this list seems dominated by Capcom's children, that's because the company ruled the fighting genre roost throughout the system's life. Where a RAM cart is indicated the price approximation is for the RAM cart boxed version of the game...

Marvel Vs Capcom (+4Mb RAM)





Japanese version only: £40–50
Original release: 22/10/98
Developer/Publisher: Capcom

The last of the *Vs* titles to appear on the Saturn. Loading times are so short you'd be forgiven for thinking this was a cartridge-based port.

Street Fighter Alpha 3 (+4Mb RAM)





Japanese version only: £35–45
Original Release: 06/08/99
Developer/Publisher: Capcom

Those who have tried them all generally consider this version of *SFA3* the best. No loading times and the Saturn pad/stick enhance an already distinguished port.

Pocket Fighter





Japanese version only: £20–40
Original release: 09/07/98
Developer/Publisher: Capcom

An amusing offshoot to the grown-up series, Capcom took the character models from *Super Puzzle Fighter 2* and made a fighting game out of it. Great, if limited, fun.

Virtua Fighter CG Portrait Collection: The final





Japanese version only: around £50
Original release: n/a (1996/GS-9073)
Developer/Publisher: Sega

Very rare gold disk which was mailed to people who could prove that they had bought the entire *Virtua Fighter CG Portrait Collection* – all ten disks.

Groove on Fight (+1Mb RAM)





Japanese version only: £45–55
Original release: 16/05/97
Developer/Publisher: Atlus

Poor framerate, long loading times and derivative mechanics hamper but don't stop this title from being a relatively enjoyable alternative to Capcom's output.

Waku Waku 7 (+1Mb RAM)





Japanese version only: £35–55
Original release: 20/06/97
Developer/Publisher: Sunsoft

The sequel to the tired *Galaxy Fight* is simply fantastic. Although the Neo-Geo iteration soundly trumps this, there is still much fun to be had here.

Dungeons & Dragons Collection (+4Mb RAM)





Japanese version only: £60–100
Original release: 04/03/99
Developer/Publisher: Capcom

This two-in-one package showcases two of Capcom's Japanese-only action RPG arcade games from the early-'90s.

Samurai Shodown 4 (+1Mb RAM)





Japanese version only: £35–45
Original release: 02/10/97
Developer/Publisher: SNK

Debate rages on between over which *SS* game holds the crown. In truth, to all but the hardcore the gameplay tweaks will seem petty.

Metal Slug (+1Mb RAM)





Japanese version only: £65–85
Original release: 04/04/97
Developer: Nasca/SNK

This port of the extremely sought after MVS game is highly superior to that of the PlayStation due to the 2D capabilities of the machine.

Dracula X





Japanese release only: £45–55
Original release: 25/06/98
Developer/Publisher:
KCE Nagoya/Konami

A disappointment despite delivering an extra playable character, new areas to explore and many weapons not seen in the PlayStation version.

The RPGs

Another blow to the Saturn offensive was the lack of a *Final Fantasy VII* rival, although with both Square and Enix batting for the other side this was always going to be too much pressure for GameArt's meagre shoulders. Sega compounded matters by failing to port many of the games it did have. Those few that leaked across the seas are generally sought after titles...

Panzer Dragoon Saga





US/UK version: £80–110
Japanese version: £15–30
Original release: 29/01/98
Developer/Publisher: Team Andromeda/Sega

Too little too late in terms of this title's wider significance to Sega's Saturn it is nevertheless a thrilling example of how skilled teams could draw the best from the machine.

Dragonforce





US/UK version: £35–45
Japanese version: £8–15
Original release: 29/03/96
Developer/Publisher: SoJ/Sega

A strategy RPG to rival *Final Fantasy Tactics*. Multiple storylines and excellent execution even resulted in a successful eastern sequel criminally left behind for the rest of the world.

Guardian Heroes





US/UK version: £15–30
Japanese version: £15–30
Original release: 26/01/96
Developer/Publisher: Treasure/ESP

Treasure's charming action RPG is one of the true bargains one can now find. For the prophetic this was the first clear confirmation of how the Saturn could deliver wonderful 2D.

Shining Force 3 Premium



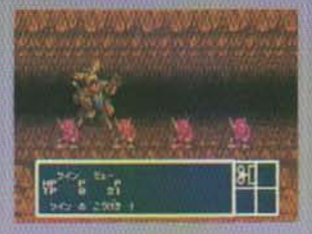


Japanese version only: £80–100
Original Release: n/a
Developer/Publisher: Camelot/Sega

The *Shining Force* series was continued in three instalments for the Saturn. *Shining Force Premium* was given free to people who bought all three parts and wrote to Camelot.

Phantasy Star Collection





Japanese version only: £60–90
Original release: 02/04/98
Developer: SoJ/Sega

Collecting all four *Phantasy Star* games in one package and adding bonuses of original television adverts and artwork, Sega sought an answer to Square's *Final Fantasy Anthology*.

Five of the most collectable games

Here are five of the best and most reasonably priced titles any Saturn buyer simply must obtain.

Shinrei Jusaishi Taromaru





Japanese version only: £110–200
Original release: 17/01/97
Developer: Time Warner Interactive

A stunning action game, released in extremely low quantities, this is probably the most desirable title for all Saturn collectors worldwide.

Prikura Daisakusen





Japanese version only: £45–60
Original release: 15/11/96
Developer: Atlus

An isometric action shooter released early in the Saturn's life. This game demands only mid-range prices that conceal its extreme rarity.

Saturn Bomberman



US/UK version: £15–30
Japanese version: £15–30
Original release: 19/07/96
Developer/Publisher: Hudson/Sega

Relatively cheap, it will probably cost you considerably more to source ten increasingly rare Saturn pads.

Silhouette Mirage





Japanese version only: £40–65
Original release: 11/09/97
Developer: Treasure/ESP

Treasure once again demonstrates the Saturn's superior 2D capabilities. Not the codeshop's best title but enjoyable nonetheless.

Princess Crown

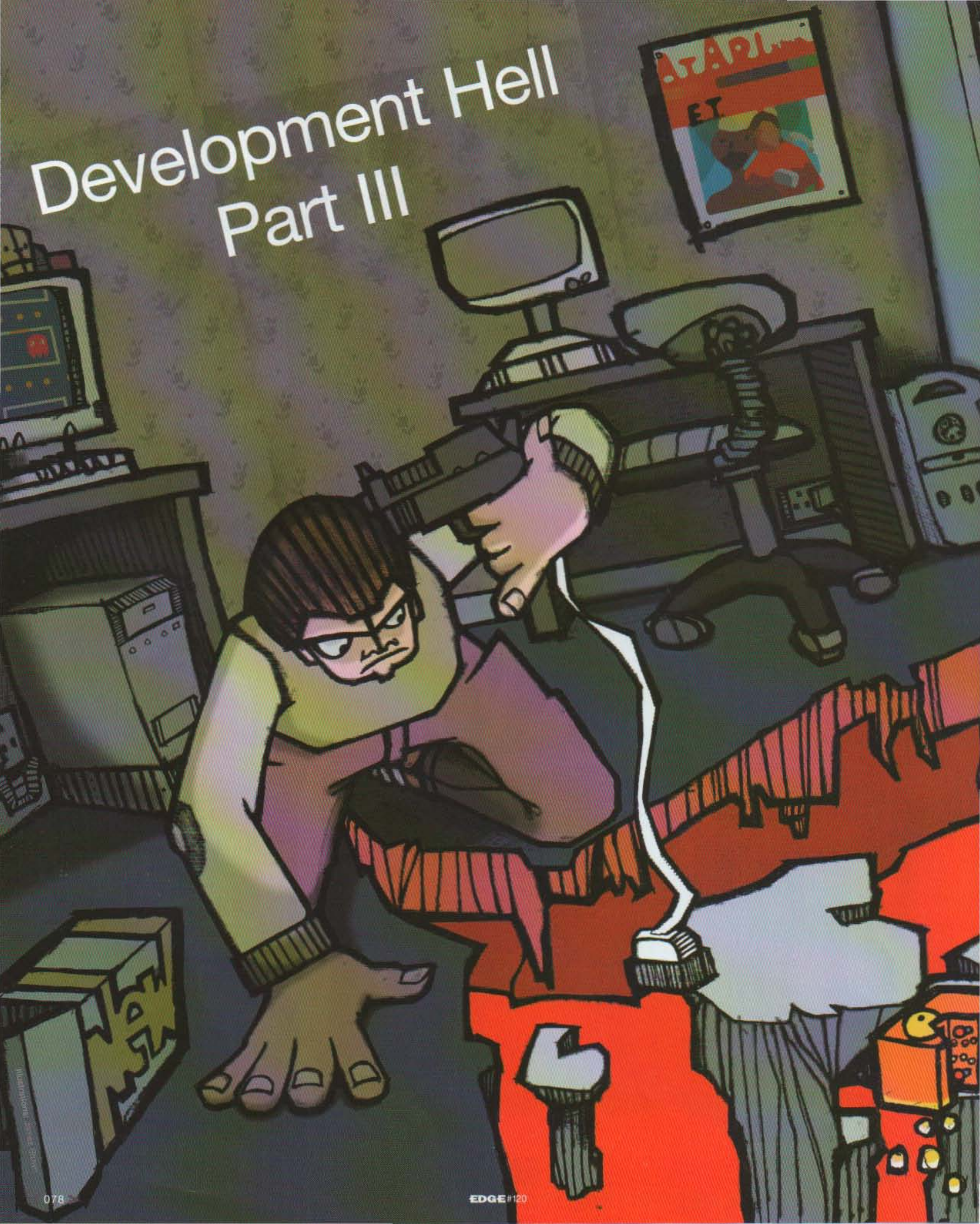




Japanese version only: £45–65
Original release: 11/12/97
Develop/Publisher: Atlus

A highly enjoyable action RPG. A shame that this game was never translated but it's still extremely playable to the importer.

Development Hell Part III





Edge looks at a selection of the more ill-conceived, unfortunate and downright dismal releases in the history of the gaming industry

In an industry where even mediocrity is an expensive and labour-intensive achievement, there will always be disasters. Divided, inexperienced or hurried development teams, clueless publishers and over-active PR departments are factors behind the failure of many games, but some débâcles – often due to a nightmarish mélange of all three – achieve a status disproportionate to their final quality. **Edge** regularly recounts tales of how great games came to be, and the reaction of the world at large. It's testament to the appeal of schadenfreude that the stories behind infinitely more infamous releases can be equally, if not *more* compelling.

To avoid repeating oft-told yarns, the likes of *Bandersnatch*, *E.T.*, Atari 2600 *Pac-Man* and Nintendo coin-op *Radarscope* have been left out. Similarly to obvious space restrictions, many other fascinating 'casualties' (for instance *Microcosm* and *Frontier: First Encounters*) have also been omitted, as too have critically-acclaimed titles that utterly failed to make their mark at retail – the latter perhaps deserving their own (rather more depressing) article.

In the Russian roulette of impulse purchasing, most of the following games were a bullet in the chamber. Own-goals, self-inflicted wounds, outrageous idiocy... call them what you will. Although not the worst titles ever released, they are some of the most memorable in the history of the games trade, but for all the wrong reasons. Greeted by antipathy, or outrage, or pity, they demonstrate instances of excessive hype (*Daikatana*, *Rise of the Robots*), incompetence (*Superman 64*, *The Great Space Race*), naivety (*The Great Giana Sisters*) and cynicism (*World Cup Carnival*). Common to each, though, are profound errors of judgement. Apropos of something or other, **Edge** recalls a 1980s aphorism: to err is divine; but to *really* screw something up, it takes a computer.

Continued >



Daikatana: the damned

When **Edge** contacts **John Romero** to discuss *Daikatana*, he politely declines. "Thanks for the offer," his prompt email begins, "but I don't really have much to say about *Daikatana*'s development difficulties (or Ion's in general) other than some very simple facts: the company started out with the wrong set of owners and hired too many green designers. By the time I left, though, the company was structured correctly and had great employees. It continues to be so to this day."

Romero's reticence is understandable: he's paid his penance, and more. Dismissed, id staff have stated, for low productivity during *Quake*'s gestation period – although he claimed his plan to establish his own codeshop was the primary reason – Romero's reputation in 1996, so entwined with that of his former employer, guaranteed lucrative employment elsewhere. Assisted by Tom Hall, a founder member of id then based at 3D Realms, he began pitching his ambitious plans for a development house to major publishers. Eidos, confident and cash-rich after the success of Core Design's *Tomb Raider* and keen to expand its portfolio, agreed to bankroll Ion Storm in a six-project deal just inside 1997.

The outspoken Romero was eminently newsworthy and so, therefore, was *Daikatana*: a game that laboured beneath the weight of its high profile before the ink on its initial (and ambitious) design document was dry. With an agreement to use the *Quake* engine in place, it was confidently stated that this first Ion Storm release would be ready within seven months. Given that its feature list promised AI-controlled 'sidekicks' and dozens of individual monsters – in contrast to the handful found in most FPS titles of the time – the company needed a talented, proven team. In a remarkable error of judgement, the group assembled included far too many individuals with precious little industry experience: amateur map creators chosen on the basis of how many times their work had been downloaded, producers who didn't actually play games; a marriage of future inconvenience. "I hired way too many people off the Internet," Romero later admitted.

Daikatana's notoriety was arguably established by two events in 1997. Firstly, the infamous text-only advertisement ("John Romero's about to make you his bitch.") is a singular example of hubris that must haunt Romero to this day. It gained additional, unfortunate resonance with the game's disastrous appearance at E3. A very early level, sans monsters and sidekicks, was given star billing on the Eidos stand beside a hotly-tipped *Tomb Raider II*. This unimpressive demonstration alone would have guaranteed a degree of adverse publicity, but the appearance of *Quake II* at the show compounded the disaster. Ion Storm had misjudged the progress of, and interest surrounding, 3D accelerator cards. The antiquated, pixellated *Quake* code powering *Daikatana* was positively embarrassed by John Carmack's new engine. Romero made the decision to upgrade to that new code, necessitating the first of many delays.

Ion Storm's $3m (£1.9m) Chase Tower penthouse offices in Dallas became a disturbingly politicised environment as 1998 led to greater setbacks. The delivery of the *Quake II* engine led to the disheartening discovery that its differing architecture made a lot of work to that point obsolete, adding a projected six months to the schedule. *Daikatana* and Ion Storm became the subject of increasing ridicule. Communication between workers faltered – and then, shockingly, the core of the *Daikatana* team quit abruptly (having, it was later revealed, secured a deal to produce a KISS-themed game for Gathering of Developers). In an age when the Internet is a cudgel for disaffected employees, the highly public nature of this split was a further blow.

At the beginning of 1999, an alarmed Eidos increased its day-to-day influence in Ion Storm affairs. In a belated piece of damage limitation, PR stunts and press visits were cancelled, and the previously publicity-hungry Texas office fell silent. By now, Valve's *Half-Life* had stolen any vestige of thunder *Daikatana* might have had. Nonetheless, its patched-up team laboured intensively to prepare a worthy demo for E3. In a mistake typical of this doomed endeavour, the game code was altered and recompiled the day before the show. The version that appeared was 'broken', and ran at a miserable ten frames per second.

Ion Storm's flagship title, having reportedly burned a high proportion of the $30m (£19m) Eidos had invested in the company, missed its Christmas deadline, and finally shipped in April of 2000. Apologists pointed out, quite rightly, that it was hardly the worst game ever created, but these voices were mere bubbles in a wave of derision. *Daikatana* stank, and sank. Romero's inevitable resignation was an epilogue to the most publicised development saga ever – a cautionary tale from which the industry, surely, has learned a great deal. Until the next time, of course.



Superman 64

The build of *Superman 64* demonstrated at 1998's *E3* was laughably dismal, so the decision of publisher Titus to delay its launch was no surprise. However, even hardened industry cynics were taken aback when, manifold flaws intact, it was released the following year. Patently unfinished and peerlessly dire (and that on a format arguably typified by technically poor thirdparty releases), *Superman 64* lingered on retail shelves despite heavy fire-sale discounting. As a cartridge release, it was an exceedingly expensive mistake – and due only to other titles more deserving of column inches, an **Edge** 'One of out Ten' that never was.

Legend of Zelda: Wand of Gamelon/Faces of Evil

The story of how Nintendo snubbed Sony and its 'PlayStation' add-on for the Super Nintendo, instead aligning itself with Philips, is a well-known tale. Even though Nintendo's initial enthusiasm for a CD-based add-on would soon cool, Philips obtained the rights to develop a set number of games based on the *Mario* and *Zelda* properties for its ill-fated CDi format – but, astonishingly, failed to appreciate the opportunity. Even the finest adventure could not have saved the underpowered and overpriced platform, but the first two *Legend of Zelda* games – *Wand of Gamelon* and *Faces of Evil*, released simultaneously – were atrocious. In the eyes of devout hardcore gamers, these releases (and a third in 1995, *Zelda's Adventures*) are tantamount to blasphemy.

The Great Space Race

Almost a peer to *Bandersnatch* in terms of hyperbolic pre-release promises, *The Great Space Race* was a high profile launch that left retailers and distributors fuming. Chairman John Peel's stock was high after the success of *Valhalla*, an early (and acclaimed) graphic adventure that netted Legend a healthy profit. Its pseudo-sequel *TGSR* was to introduce incredible advances in AI and graphics technology. Rumours circulated by magazines (later denied by Peel) that a mansion was acquired and filled with programmers-for-hire added to its eventual infamy – and the final product truly was dire. Written in BASIC, with no real 'gameplay' to speak of. Disgusted reviewers complained that it effectively played itself, and retailers were left with vast numbers of unsold copies even when it was discounted to £1.99 – and that from an original RRP of £15. Peel estimated Legend's losses on the game at over £250,000, but its reputation was forever tarnished. One forgotten release later, Legend quietly disappeared.



Daikatana (PC) Eidos, 2000





Legend of Zelda (CDi) Philips, 1993





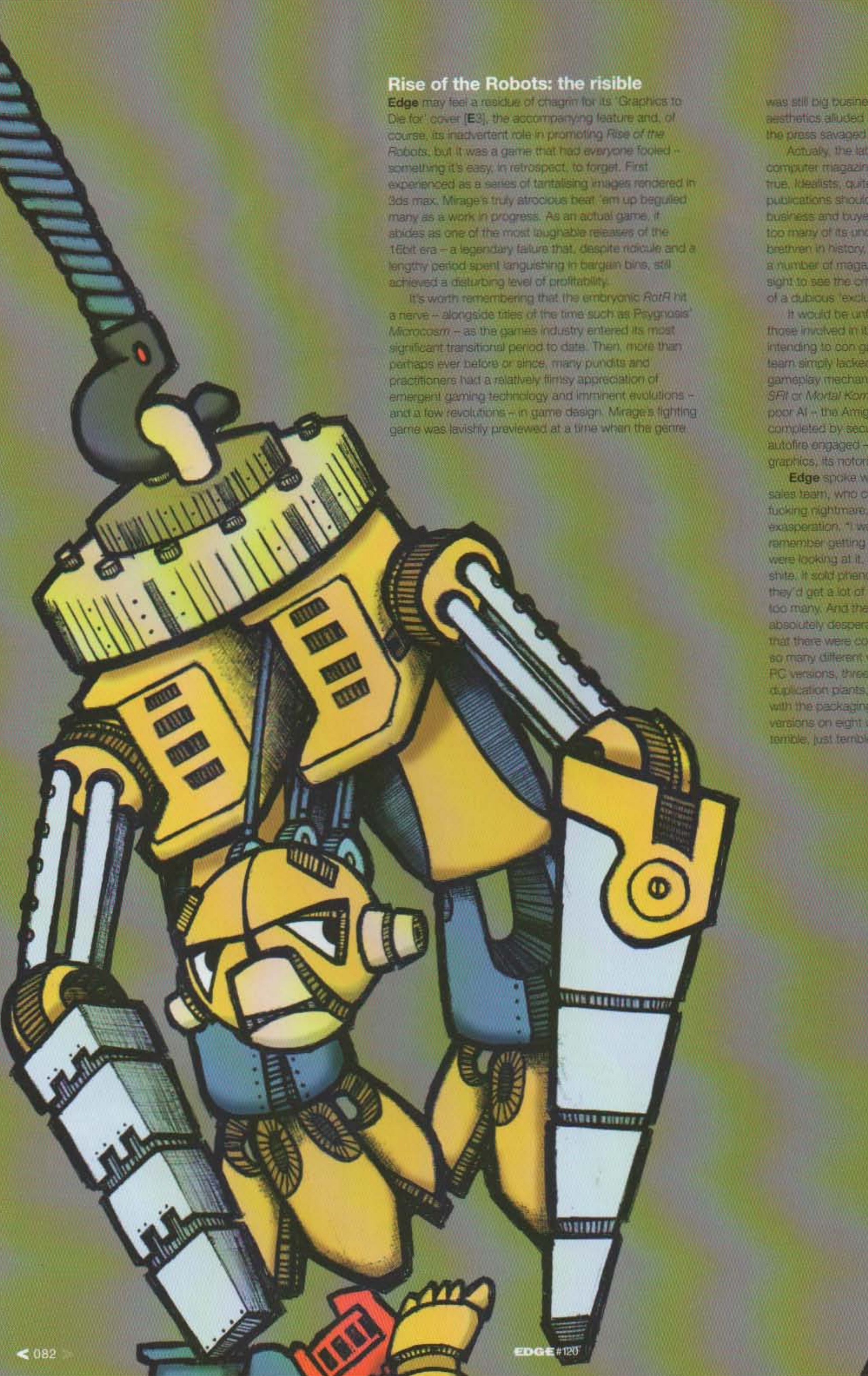


TGSR (Spectrum, C64) Legend, 1984





Superman 64 (N64) Titus, 1999



Rise of the Robots: the risible

Edge may feel a residue of chagrin for its 'Graphics to Die for' cover [**E**3], the accompanying feature and, of course, its inadvertent role in promoting *Rise of the Robots*, but it was a game that had everyone fooled – something it's easy, in retrospect, to forget. First experienced as a series of tantalising images rendered in 3ds max, Mirage's truly atrocious beat 'em up beguiled many as a work in progress. As an actual game, it abides as one of the most laughable releases of the 16bit era – a legendary failure that, despite ridicule and a lengthy period spent languishing in bargain bins, still achieved a disturbing level of profitability.

It's worth remembering that the embryonic *RotR* hit a nerve – alongside titles of the time such as Psygnosis' *Microcosm* – as the games industry entered its most significant transitional period to date. Then, more than perhaps ever before or since, many pundits and practitioners had a relatively flimsy appreciation of emergent gaming technology and imminent evolutions – and a few revolutions – in game design. Mirage's fighting game was lavishly previewed at a time when the genre was still big business. Its distinct, ostensibly hi-tech aesthetics alluded to far more than it delivered; piqued, the press savaged it at launch.

Actually, the latter point – to the shame of the computer magazine industry – was not universally true. Idealists, quite rightly, assert that consumer publications should represent a barrier between business and buyer. Yet *Rise of the Robots*, like far too many of its underpowered and over-hyped brethren in history, received laughably high scores in a number of magazines. As ever, it was a frustrating sight to see the critical process subverted by the allure of a dubious 'exclusive'.

It would be unfair – indeed, incorrect – to accuse those involved in its development of deliberately intending to con gamers. Lamentably, its development team simply lacked the talent, and then time, to include gameplay mechanics to rival even the most moribund *SFII* or *Mortal Kombat* clone. With few moves, tragically poor AI – the Amiga version, famously, could be completed by securing a joystick on a diagonal axis with autofire engaged – and, in practice, hugely disappointing graphics, its notoriety is well deserved.

Edge spoke with an individual who worked on its sales team, who chooses to remain nameless. "It was a fucking nightmare," the source exclaims, with evident exasperation. "I was doing a sales job, and I can remember getting calls... retailers, especially the indies, were looking at it, and calling us to say it was a pile of shite. It sold phenomenally well, but retailers knew that they'd get a lot of them back, and that they'd ordered too many. And they were right – the game was absolutely desperate. What compounded the issue was that there were cock-ups with duplication. There were so many different versions. There must have been four PC versions, three Amiga, three ST, from three different duplication plants, and with different companies dealing with the packaging, and there were mix-ups. There were versions on eight disks, versions on four disks... it was terrible, just terrible."



RotR (various) Mirage/Time Warner/Interplay, 1994



Night Trap (M-CD) Sega, 1992




UO: Renaissance (PC) EA, 2000



Anarchy Online (PC) Funcom, 2001

Anarchy Online

Pioneers they may be, but the dated appearance of leading MMRPGs *Ultima Online* and *Everquest* is regarded as their Achilles' heel. *Anarchy Online*, with its comparatively sophisticated visage and futuristic setting, was tipped in 2001 as a genuine competitor to both – perhaps, even, a potential market leader. What followed was a botched launch of epic proportions. Within this limited space, it would be impossible to relate a fraction of issues players encountered. Crash bugs, monumental lag and dismal performance on even the most powerful PC rig were just a few side-effects of its profoundly 'broken' engine; widespread cheating and the exploitation of developer oversights were evidence of vastly insufficient playtesting. Although it has since been patched into a playable form, Funcom squandered a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and is still reeling from the self-inflicted blow.

Ultima Online: Renaissance

Although not in the same league as other games featured here, *Ultima Online: Renaissance* was a costly mistake. A keenly-awaited expansion pack for Origin's flawed but popular MMRPG, *Renaissance* caused great consternation among *Ultima Online* devotees when it shipped into US stores with certain key advertised features disabled. The most important enhancement, promised on its packaging and within its manual – and the reason many bought it – was that *Renaissance* doubled the size of the *UO* play area. Unfortunately, Origin had not finished programming work and EA was unwilling to delay the game's delivery to stores. The missing features were 'switched on' weeks after launch, and a worthy (but expensive) conciliatory measure of 60 days' free subscription for all buyers was offered to minimise fallout.



Night Trap

Famously described as "filth" in a senate hearing by a senator who – it was soon revealed – had never played it, *Night Trap* was disproportionately controversial. Far from risque – bar the mischievous use of the acronym 'S.C.A.T.' for the special police team in its plot – and excruciatingly cringeworthy, this FMV-oriented title required players to 'guard' a chastely-attired group of girls from attack by vampires during a slumber party. It was an awful game, and the media outrage brought that fact to the attention of many – thus inflicting no end of damage to the reputation of Sega's expensive (and ailing) Mega Drive add-on, the Mega-CD.



World Cup Carnival: the infamous 'sting'

US Gold, acquired and absorbed into the Eidos Interactive fold in the mid-'90s, was a software house with an admirable track record. From vicarious kudos derived from high-profile conversions of US imports, to its own output, it was a giant of the adolescent entertainment software business. It was also responsible for one of the most breathtakingly cynical episodes in the history of the games trade. Released in 1986 to coincide with the tournament in Mexico, *World Cup Carnival* was an expensive 8bit title at £9.95 but was lavishly packaged in a PC-style box – giving it a striking presence on store shelves for the time – containing posters, stickers and, of course, the game itself. In terms of presentation it was pure marketing genius, but the game itself, shockingly, was a *slightly* modified version of a previously released title: *World Cup Football*.

World Cup Football had been a modest success for Artic Software in 1984, being the first attempt at a 'playable' simulation of the sport to be released for the Spectrum. Early enthusiasm for what was, in truth, a patently awful game was soon dispelled by the release of Jon Ritman's *Match Day*. By 1986, Artic's game looked positively archaic, and US Gold's addition of a simple penalty shoot-out sub-game and appropriate team names improved it not a jot.

"Oh, it was diabolical," agrees US Gold founder **Geoff Brown**, now of Kaboom Studios. "It got a review in one magazine of minus one, or something like that – but, of course, they didn't get to see it until it was already in the shops." It being the exclusive 'official' game of the competition, Brown received enormous pre-orders for *World Cup Carnival* from distributors encouraged by – he remembers with a chuckle – "being shown only the packaging and the stuff that came with it." Following delivery of the actual game, US Gold's phone lines were soon jammed.

"I can remember **Tim Chaney** [then part of the US Gold management team and, later, a pivotal figure in the golden age of Virgin Interactive] hiding under the desk and saying, 'I can't take any more of these calls,'" recalls Brown. "But I called their bluff. I told the distributors that any amount of copies they didn't want I'd take back from them, because they were going to be in short supply. No one took me up on the offer. I've called *World Cup Carnival* 'the sting' – because that's what it was, in many ways."

"*World Cup Carnival* is a modified, improved, enhanced, localised version of another piece of software," Tim Chaney told the now-defunct trade paper 'CTW' in response to the growing controversy. "It has two A2 colour posters, a cloth patch, the World Cup competition – all in addition to a better version of the game." The biggest irony, however, was that the original Artic version was being sold at £1.99 by budget specialist Paxman Promotions, who would receive a £20,000 settlement from US Gold due to a dispute over rights to the title. By the time major gaming magazines could publish scathing reviews, it had become an ill-deserved hit. "*World Cup Carnival* is an appalling game," wrote one 'Crash' reviewer, "and it's a disgrace to see a top publisher like US Gold releasing it."

Responding to news articles and numerous letters from irate consumers, US Gold attempted to justify its use of Artic's game in 'Crash' – a twist to the tale that is reported on a number of retro sites. The company had, it assured Spectrum owners, commissioned a developer to create a game more sophisticated than the benchmark *Match Day*; a company that had subsequently entered into liquidation, leaving US Gold with an impossible deadline to meet. Licensing *World Cup Football* had been an unfortunate necessity though they maintained that the package – with its extras – represented, "very good value for money."

"That's not actually true," Brown tells **Edge** with a laugh and here, revealed at last, is the real story. "What actually happened was a mistake – we were dealing with so many games at the time. One day, I can't remember when but early in 1986, I asked Tim Chaney how the World Cup game was going. And he said, 'I thought *you* were dealing with it!' We had to get a game in, and fast, but no one was able to do anything within the timeframe. And that's when we got in touch with Artic..."

The Bouncer

Final Fight, *Streets of Rage* and *Double Dragon* are fondly-remembered titles, but the side-scrolling beat 'em up became curiously unfashionable during the 32bit era. It's hard to pinpoint exactly why, although the creative bankruptcy of the genre's practitioners was certainly a major factor. When Squaresoft announced *The Bouncer*, few were surprised when it immediately became one of the most eagerly-awaited first-generation PS2 titles. Early video footage and tantalising stills were enormously promising. It looked beautiful but, moreover, these demonstrations made *The Bouncer* seem like a fulfilment of the average gamer's wish list for the genre – particularly its highly interactive scenery and spectacular set-pieces. Rumour has it that developer Dream Factory (of *Ehrgeiz* and *Tobal* fame) was forced to severely temper its ambition to hit the deadline of the PS2 launch – and its final form was a crushing disappointment, a shadow of the game early footage suggested it could have been. Release in haste, repent at leisure...



World Cup Carnival (Spec, C64) US Gold, 1986



The Bouncer (PS2) Squaresoft, 2000



The Great Giana Sisters (C64) Rainbow Arts, 1988



Ultima IX: Ascension (PC) EA, 1999



The Great Giana Sisters

As the games industry matured in the early- to mid-'80s, larger publishers and coin-op manufacturers became increasingly vigilant in preventing (and punishing) casual IP infringement. Quite why Rainbow Arts felt that *The Great Giana Sisters*, a particularly shameless clone of *Super Mario Bros*, could avoid the sentinel-like gaze and subsequent wrath of Nintendo is a mystery. Withdrawn from sale within a fortnight of its launch – just, with due irony, as glowing magazine reviews and word of mouth had made it eminently desirable – it became one of the most sought-after pirate games of the late-'80s. Its complete but unreleased Spectrum incarnation remains a much coveted piece of code.

Ultima IX: Ascension

Acrimonious departures of key *Ascension* design staff threw the project into turmoil through 1998, but it was Origin's disastrous misreading of the evolving 3D accelerator market that damned this ninth singleplayer *Ultima* game. When development began in earnest during 1997, 3dfx was king of the PC 3D market, and the team designed *Ascension* specifically to run on the Voodoo board. By the time of its rushed launch, however, 3dfx rival (and eventual owner) nVidia had established a huge user base. Running on a Voodoo board via the proprietary Glide API, *Ascension* was a system hog yet, other issues aside for a moment, performed reasonably well – but with the Direct 3D API favoured by nVidia it would barely run at all. Worse still, the title was infested with crash bugs, including one that prevented the completion of the game without the use of cheats. Although eventually patched into a playable state, the damage to years of accrued goodwill and Origin's stature was huge.

Interview: Derek Smart on Battlecruiser 3000AD

Outspoken, passionate, and therefore both admired and derided, **Derek Smart** has worked tirelessly to restore a reputation tarnished by the unfinished release of *Battlecruiser 3000AD*. Having worked on his opus since 1989, Smart's life was turned upside-down when he signed with Take 2 Interactive in 1995. After a sequence of events that led to his departure and the launch of the game in a practically unplayable form, he refused to let *Battlecruiser* die. Unpaid and unsupported, he set about patching it, even providing technical support to players worldwide. **Edge** invites Smart to cast his mind back to the events leading up to and after the traumatic Christmas of '95...

When did the disagreements with the publisher Take 2 begin? At what point were you certain that *BC3000AD* would not hit its deadline for an Christmas launch?

The disagreements began when I went up to Latrobe, Pennsylvania (I left Miami, Florida my then home) to work with the dev team that Take 2 had also acquired, to work on completing *BC3000AD*. To me, it seemed like since I was pretty green with no industry record – it was my first game – I was stepping on the toes of some who felt that I had too much control over the product, despite the fact that it was 100 per cent mine.

Going in, we already knew that the game wouldn't make Christmas. We asked for more time and it was declined. The next thing I know – though I thought they were bluffing – I was told that the game was going in a box regardless. At that point, I hollered for my attorney, got a contractual release from Take 2, and went back home to Miami.

How bad were things before you resigned? How did it feel to leave *Battlecruiser* behind, being fully aware of how the public and press would react to the release of the unfinished code, and the potential damage to your reputation?

Things weren't that bad actually; it's just that they had gotten out of hand. Everyone was doing things to cover their butts, while I kept going out on a limb by doing such, at the time, unheard of things as refusing to compromise on my game's design and refusing to chop it up in order to meet the corporate-imposed ship date.

When I left (I wasn't contractually obligated to be there, to begin with), it never occurred to me that I was leaving *Battlecruiser* behind. I just figured that it was the beginning of a long drawn-out legal process to get away from Take 2 and wrestle back the rights to an IP that I had staked my life and career on. Because I didn't think the game would ever get released without my consent, the events that followed (and which you make reference to) never occurred to me. Back then I wasn't as knowledgeable as I am now about the industry and the lengths at which publishers would go to come up with a royal and unprecedented cock-up.

At what point did you initiate legal proceedings against Take 2/Gametek? What was their initial reaction, and how much hope did you have, in truth, that you could wrestle *BC3000AD* from their grasp?

As soon as they released the game, I got my attorney involved. It took almost a year or so of going back and forth to get it all sorted out. Naturally, their initial reaction was to laugh at me; probably thinking I wouldn't take on a publisher and had no resources to do so. [Laughs] Who knew?

I didn't have much confidence that I'd prevail and get my IP rights back but the contract was crystal clear: I owned the IP, and that was something to work with. I had hope. Plus, my tenacity and outrageously outspoken attitude, paid off I suppose. I had no intentions of letting them get away with it and at the risk of getting blacklisted, or worse, literally tossed out of the industry, I stuck to my guns. I figured that if I was going to get blacklisted and tossed out, I wasn't (a) leaving without a fight or (b) leaving without my properties.

At what point – and why, in your opinion – did Take 2/Gametek eventually agree to allow rights to *BC3000AD* pass back to you?

In the end, I think Take 2 just got tired of my public antics and just decided that I wasn't worth the aggravation after all. Especially since, due to the outcry of the release, they deemed the IP to be worthless and the *Battlecruiser* name as good as dead. It didn't help either that Take 2 was in the process of getting ready to go public. As such, I was the last person on Earth they wanted a loose end with I think. Especially since I had grown famous, vocal and even more recognised, literally overnight – all as a result of their very mistake. Seemingly overnight, I was 'the *Battlecruiser* guy' and my name and franchise was connected to Take 2.

Your decision to release a patched version of *BC3000AD* as a 'free' download was very popular. How successful was it?

It was very successful and remained in the charts for many months and is still is a very popular download. That's the thing about the Net, people like free stuff. In fact, that seemingly innocent act, fashioned in order to prevent Take 2/Gametek from profiting from sales of the game, made the game even more popular and the response alone was instrumental in my inking the Interplay deal. As if on cue, once Interplay's rights to *BC3000AD v2.0* expired, I released that too. The last time I checked all download sites, it has been downloaded close to 450,000 times.

Trespasser

With head designer Austin Grossman and project leader Seamus Blackley both Looking Glass graduates, *Trespasser* was quite understandably regarded as a hot prospect. Dreamworks promised incredible AI, with dinosaurs reacting 'authentically' (attacking for reasons of hunger or self-defence rather than in pre-programmed waves, and fleeing when injured), realistic physics (every item having distinct physical properties) and, moreover, a 'revolution' in FPS design – players would interact with the world with a mouse-controlled 'arm'.

In practice, the AI was hilariously bad, the physics engine anything but natural, and control of your protagonist's arm painfully awkward – a patently flawed concept. A score of two in **Edge** was only one of many critical rebukes for unwarranted hyperbole and shoddy implementation; gamers sensibly noted their disapproval with closed wallets.

Anachronox

With hindsight, it's arguable that **Edge** was a little harsh in awarding four out of ten to *Anachronox*. A ambitious labour of love for industry veteran Tom Hall, it was billed – more by the specialist press than Hall himself – as an attempt to create a PC-specific title of *Final Fantasy*-style stature and substance. In that sense, it was certainly a failure. Many of Hall's ideas were shelved in order to ship it, and it was cursed by – in a curious parallel with *Final Fantasy VII*'s early Midgar section – a laborious opening chapter that only the dedicated were willing to endure. Unfairly sullied by its association with stablemate *Daikatana*, *Anachronox* met with mostly lukewarm reviews and a positively icy reception at retail. Nonetheless, there is a redemptive aspect to its story: it became a cult favourite among PC owners willing to invest the initial effort, and then time, to complete it.

Sensible Soccer

It's a little-known story, but *Sensible Soccer*'s Mega Drive release candidate was rejected by Sega for a tiny error: the Italian flag was incorrect. This necessitated another submission (with the offending mistake corrected), which delayed the game's launch by a number of weeks. This hiatus gave a new football game, originally due to hit stores after *Sensible Soccer*, a lucky window of opportunity. Its name? *FIFA International Soccer*. Further misfortune befell the esteemed franchise when its debut appearance on the PlayStation – not coded by Sensible – was a poorly-coded catastrophe that met with predictable scorn. Were it not for these two events, would *Sensible Soccer* still be around today? We'll never know for sure.



***Battlecruiser 3000AD* (PC)** Take 2, 1996

***Trespasser* (PC)** Dreamworks Interactive, 1998



***Anachronox* (PC)** Eidos, 2001



***Sensible Soccer* (MD)** Sensible Software, 1993

Edge's review policy

Every issue, **Edge** evaluates the best, most interesting, hyped, innovative or promising games on a scale of ten, where five naturally represents the middle value. **Edge**'s rating system is fair, progressive and balanced. An average game deserves an average mark – not, as many believe, seven out of ten. Scores broadly correspond to the following sentiments: zero: nothing, one: disastrous, two: appalling, three: severely flawed, four: disappointing, five: average, six: competent, seven: distinguished, eight: excellent, nine: astounding, ten: revolutionary.

Edge's most played

Legend of Zelda: Winds of Takuto

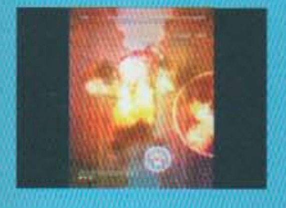
Yes, we've been playing the Japanese code, and it's absolutely stunning. But a full review won't appear in **Edge** until the subtleties of plot are available to us.



(GameCube) Nintendo

Ikaruga

A selection of extra play modes over the DC version, increased display options (including HDTV support) enhance an already excellent game. April PAL release.



(GameCube) Infogrames

Advance Wars

The news of a sequel has brought **Edge** back to the battlefield, and now we remember why we left in the first place. This game eats time and destroys your life.



(Game Boy Advance) Nintendo

Colin McRae Rally 3

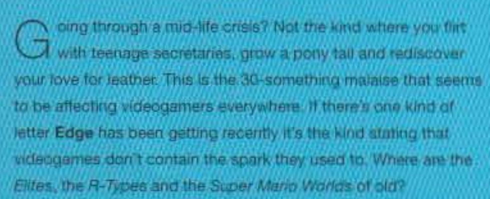
Easily the best rally sim around at the moment – believes **Edge**'s art editor. Just don't go straight on to the roads after a particularly intense session.



(Xbox, PS2) Codemasters

Links to the past

Where's the passion these days?



Going through a mid-life crisis? Not the kind where you flirt with teenage secretaries, grow a pony tail and rediscover your love for leather. This is the 30-something malaise that seems to be affecting videogamers everywhere. If there's one kind of letter **Edge** has been getting recently it's the kind stating that videogames don't contain the spark they used to. Where are the *Elites*, the *R-Types* and the *Super Mario Worlds* of old?

Fortunately this month presented us with some games to savour. January also gave us several reasons to keep the faith. While *Crimson Sea*, *Panzer Dragoon Orta* and *O.TO.GI* may seem like typical Japanese esoteria, they are all excellently executed titles that combine depth with accessibility. Problem is, they're unlikely to receive the localisation and marketing resources they deserve when released in the west. Like *Jet Set Radio Future* all of them threaten to appear with a flatulent fanfare then sink without a trace. They are an acquired taste, perhaps, but well worth trying if you can feel your passion for games is draining away.

More interesting still is the release of the seminal *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past*, containing multiplayer bonus *Four Swords*. Most classic retrogames remain playable and fun, even after the haze of nostalgia has dissipated. But this 2D RPG does something more: it utterly reinvigorates your passion for gaming. Lazy words and phrases can be used to describe its brilliance: it's charming, it's balanced, the plotting is delicate, the puzzles clever, but none get to the nub of the matter. *A Link to the Past* gets you involved in its universe from the very first minute. Although the world is sprawling the goals are focused, though the characters are tiny the characterisation is exquisite.

Ennui is partly a symptom of mass delusion brought about by over-zealous marketing. Publishers, developers and the general gaming press will tell you that games such as *The Getaway* and *Star Wars Bounty Hunter* are excellent examples of the form. How can you not be disappointed when these overblown titles fail to engage and enrich? But how many people will bother to even look at the box to *Mr Driller Drill Land*? There are games out there that can rekindle the old fire. You just have to look hard enough.



090





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Panzer Dragoon Orta

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Sega** Developer: **Smilebit** Price: **¥6,800 (£35)** Release: **Out now (Japan), March (UK)**





As you'd expect, *Orta* is a quite beautiful game, from deserted wastes and picturesque valleys to berserk attacks and abstract landscapes



It's been a long wait, but it's finally here. Fans of the *Panzer Dragoon* series might still be slightly disappointed by the fact that Sega has chosen to resuscitate the on-rails shooter incarnation of the series rather than the RPG flavour of eBay darling, *Panzer Dragoon Saga*; fans of on-rails shooters will just be happy that at least one publisher continues to persevere with a genre that was considered unfashionable even when the original *Panzer Dragoon* evolved out of a Silicon Graphics demo to whip Saturn fanboys into a frenzy seven years ago. But was the wait worth it? Of course it was. As to whether it's any good, well that's a slightly different matter.

With only one publisher producing on-rails shooters of any note, it's impossible not to compare *Panzer Dragoon Orta* with the most recent example of the genre, UGA's sublime *Rez*. Both games are the response to the same problem; that of updating a type of game that is widely perceived as defunct, making it relevant to audiences that currently seem preoccupied with conducting virtual criminal capers in entire cities. Unfortunately for Smilebit, the comparison is not entirely favourable to *Orta*. Whereas UGA kept things simple, refining only the visual and aural aesthetic, Smilebit has tampered with the very fabric of the genre, by adding new controls – the ability to accelerate and decelerate, and the ability to switch between different dragoon forms – and by veering from the established crescendo to climax level structure.

It doesn't quite work, on either count. The introduction of additional controls overcomplicates the action – particularly when using the more clumsy western controller. And the decision to vary the pacing of levels results in some forgettable sequences. Basic controls will be instantly familiar to seasoned *Panzer* players; cycle the view through the four points of the compass, shooting down enemies or incoming projectiles using a target lock if necessary, while a berserk mode charges up after successive attacks allowing for a temporary burst of increased firepower. The major new introduction is that players can cycle through the three dragoon




Boss encounters require frequent acceleration or deceleration, but manoeuvring uses up part of a gauge that refills over time. The Base Wing's gauge affords two manoeuvres, the Glide Wing's three

Previously in E112, E117

















Choosing the right dragoon form as the situation demands introduces a tactical element, but also adds an unwelcome layer of complication



The original *Panzer Dragoon* is the most desirable unlockable, but there are several other minigames, artwork and cinematics

forms, accessing their particular strengths and weaknesses.

The Base Wing, as you'd expect, boasts average firepower, and average agility, being able to accelerate or decelerate twice before having to recharge. The Glide Wing is the most agile form (able to accelerate three times before having to wait to recharge), but though it boasts the weakest firepower, it's uniquely effective at dodging and shooting incoming projectiles. Finally, the Heavy Wing can't accelerate or decelerate at all, but it features the most destructive firepower and the most effective berserk attack. While this all adds a greater degree of tactical depth, it's at the cost of decreasing the instinctive immediacy that characterises the best shoot 'em ups. And though cycling through the three forms is quick and easy it's not possible to switch directly to any given form, which can produce a few unnecessarily hairy moments. Combine this with the acceleration/deceleration required to defeat certain enemies – largely bosses – and the game features a quite significant, and not wholly welcome, degree of complexity.

"Anyone awaiting an on-rails shooter that's as accomplished as Rez will feel underwhelmed, but Panzer enthusiasts will be delighted"

Equally, though most of the game's ten chapters subscribe to a conventional pacing and rhythm, there are some that toy with it – starting with a boss encounter for example, or finishing without a boss. None of these

Sound choice

Although the Japanese version of the game comes packaged with a soundtrack CD, the musical accompaniment to *Orta*'s endeavours is actually rather mixed. At its best it's reminiscent of previous chapters in the series, the 5.1 score complementing the action brilliantly, but at it's worst it's just offensively intrusive. For the large part it's simply innocuous and forgettable, but for a series that has historically impressed in this area, it's a bit of a disappointment – particularly since *Rez* has set new standards for the use of sound in a game of this type.



Although it's a bit disappointing in purely mechanical terms, *Orta* is a welcome return to the imaginative landscapes of a much-cherished series, and ought to be commended for that









As a technical demo for the power of the Xbox, *Orta* will probably remain unsurpassed. Which somehow seems rather appropriate for a series that started life as a technical demo for Silicon Graphics hardware



Boss encounters vary from the instantly memorable to the downright forgettable

levels is entirely successful, and most are simply unremarkable. Most lamentable of all is the fact that the game's final boss is entirely nondescript. Those levels that do stick in the mind after playing them are generally those, like the first two for example, that subscribe to the classic formula of using waves of attackers to create a crescendo which culminates in a climactic boss encounter. In this respect the inclusion of the original *Panzer Dragoon* as an unlockable extra, though it accentuates the almost impossibly beautiful visual splendour of *Orta*, also, ironically, serves to highlight the structural inadequacies of the new iteration.

But though these are undeniable disappointments, *Orta*'s greatest strength is the way in which it revives and revisits fond gaming memories. The core gameplay is instantly familiar, and musical themes, enemies and level architecture have all been used to deliberately evoke recollections of previous games in the series. And it is just as visually stunning as every episode in the series so far has been. There are also various neat touches, from the multiple paths that add replay value, to the greater range of freedom to manoeuvre out of the screen. It's also possible to evolve the abilities of the three forms by destroying certain targets or enemies that release evolution-inducing power-ups. Significantly, players are faced with a choice of generalisation or specialisation, since it's not possible to fully evolve all three forms.

Perhaps the most impressive feature of the game is the way in which an initially brief lifespan (under three hours in the default difficulty setting) is remedied by providing a sumptuous and comprehensive suite of unlockable extras. Aside from the original *Panzer Dragoon*, which remains refreshingly playable, though not entirely analogue, there is a host of artwork and cinematics to enjoy. And though they're fairly disposable and short, there are also various sub-missions, allowing players to enjoy the action from a variety of viewpoints.

So while anyone awaiting an on-rails shooter that's as accomplished as *Rez* will feel slightly underwhelmed, *Panzer Dragoon* enthusiasts will be blissfully delighted by Smilebit's authentic recreation of a much-loved game universe. As for those who remain unmoved by a genre that's overwhelmingly linear? Well that's their problem. Philistines.

Edge rating: **Seven** out of ten

O.TO.GI

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **From Software** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800 (£35)** Release: **Out now (Japan), TBC (UK)**

There are some games that simply exceed the sum of their parts: *Ico*, for example, or *Rez*, to name but two. And now *O.TO.GI* to name a third. Just as there are those who fail to see *Ico* as anything more than just another dungeon crawl, or *Rez* as anything other than an atavistic throwback to simpler times, there will no doubt be some for whom *O.TO.GI* is just a thirdperson action title that's over all too quickly. This, however, is to miss the point. From Software has produced a game that exhibits such an effervescent confidence in the videogame form and produces such dizzying sensory satisfaction that it defies the constraints of the genre.

The flaws that these doubters will alight upon are likely to be a camera that falls slightly short of satisfactory; an initial duration that's undeniably brief; and a default difficulty level that errs a little too far on the easy side of caution. Such criticisms are valid, though not really material. Completion of the first 29 missions is unlikely to take much more than eight hours, but doing so unlocks a higher difficulty setting and it's also possible to return to completed stages throughout the game with better weapons and more powerful magic. Equally, the camera only becomes problematic during one or two levels, since a target lock combined with the sublime sense of control enables you to enact destruction on a grand scale without hindrance.

"From Raiko's swirling-cherry-blossom entrance, to the watercolour sketches of enemies and items, Heian Japan is depicted with panache"







Although *O.TO.GI* is short, it manages to pack in a greater number of memorable encounters than most other games that are twice the size

In any case, despite these flaws, *O.TO.GI*'s underlying mechanics are sound. After the unbridled simplicity offered by the demo given away at last year's Tokyo Game Show, the scope for tactical customisation can initially be a little bewildering; completing missions earns experience with which to purchase new weapons, magic and accessories or repair existing weapons. But once the action starts, it quickly becomes intuitive, thanks in part to the elegant control implementation that also figured largely in that demo. Graceful aerial combos are facilitated by combining a dash move with double jumps and environment-rending mêlée attacks, and destroying demonic assailants in an elegant manner forms a substantial part of the action. All the while, a magic gauge counts down until its eventual depletion gradually and fatally saps health.



Combat in *O.TO.GI* is enhanced immeasurably by the joyously rendered sense of control, but despite the consequent possibility of balletic violence, the game is about so much more than simply fighting enemies. Most missions are more cerebral than that, each featuring some sort of set-piece action in its own right

So far, so conventional, though *O.TO.GI* is anything but a standard thirdperson action title, thanks to the brilliantly atmospheric and imaginative way in which a classic Japanese folk tale has been re-imagined and brought to digital life. The story of Raiko the demon-killer has been retold countless times through Kabuki theatre performances, classical music and woodblock prints. From Software's stylish interpretation is assured, and informs the game with a profusion of breathtaking moments. From Raiko's swirling-cherry-blossom entrance, to the watercolour sketches of enemies and items, Heian Japan is depicted with panache, and each stage is a remarkable set-piece in its own right.

Indeed while mass destruction is the game's core focus, each mission offers a different twist, be it engaging a majestic sky dragon in combat against a backdrop of lethally bristling lightning, or crucifying a massive spider demon before he escapes his bindings. During a great many stages it's even possible, or advisable, to avoid combat altogether, to focus on more varied objectives, such as destroying a massive fountain, or racing through magic portals before Raiko's health dissipates.

By bravely appropriating the themes of folk tales that have been extensively retold by more respected forms of entertainment and transforming them into such an unabashedly stylish and unique videogame, From Software has demonstrated an inspirational confidence in the medium and a refreshing faith in its audience. And by doing so, it has produced a quite beautiful experience.

Edge rating: **Eight** out of **ten**

Previously in **E**117








Additional experience can be earned by high-scoring combos, or uncovering secrets, allowing access to a broader range of weaponry and spells with which to wreak destructive havoc on the forces of darkness

Turning Japanese (into English)

It will be interesting to see whether *O.TO.GI* is to benefit from a PAL conversion that does justice to From Software's staggering recreation of Heian myth. With so much time and effort having gone into creating a sense of pseudo-historical authenticity, it would be a shame for a sloppy or inadequate localisation job to undermine the game's strongest facet. Unfortunately, since videogames based on Japanese folklore boast little obvious appeal to mainstream western audiences, **Edge** isn't confident.






Crimson Sea

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Koei** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800 (£35)** Release: **Out now (Japan), March (UK)**







You'll find team-mates invaluable when confronting bosses, but keeping them alive can sometimes be rather tough

So, *Dynasty Warriors* with guns then. Certainly anyone jumping to such a conclusion without having actually played *Crimson Sea* could be forgiven any rashness. After all, this is the latest game from the publisher that has made its reputation in recent years by putting deliriously high numbers at the disposal of multiple-combo-happy gamers, and pre-release screenshots and demos did little to suggest that the company's latest Xbox exclusive would confound expectations. Every indication was that it would simply give the company's well-established battlefield warfare series a distinctly sci-fi twist. So the fact that the game constantly does surprise is surely to be commended.

Yes, there are several levels with which *Dynasty Warrior* die-hards will be familiar. Early levels in particular are geared towards throwing absurd amounts of alien assailants onscreen and expecting them to be dispatched with a variety of guns, Neo-Psionics, and mêlée weapons, before reaching climax with a suitably tense encounter with a bigger, harder alien. During one stage, **Edge** managed to pull off a combo that took out over 900 enemies, and though this is as good an indicator as any as to how many individuals are concealed within the oncoming swarms, it's not an entirely extraordinary occurrence.

But this isn't all there is to *Crimson Sea*. Although these levels don't have the broad tactical sweep or the ebb and flow of the battlefield as the *Dynasty Warriors* series does, during most of them there is still the added dimension of AI-controlled team-mates who can be arranged in tactical formation from a simple menu. And indecision over whether to keep your colleagues alive with recovery items or to save them for yourself and go it alone is constant. There are also intermediate hub-levels which add an RPG-lite flavour to the game, during which NPCs can be engaged in conversation, training missions conducted, and a wide selection of weapons and different types of Neo-Psionics can be purchased. Such a selection gives missions a broader tactical scope than might otherwise be imagined, since weapons vary significantly in their rate of fire, range and power, and Neo-Psionic abilities are each distinct, ranging from simple offensive capabilities to invulnerability, or even the power to temporarily suspend enemies in the air.

"The wide array of objectives, and the disparate playing styles that they engender is what is so refreshing about Crimson Sea"



Controller rumble brilliantly adds to the tension as enemies hove into view



Neo-Psionics are probably the best way to extricate yourself from dicey situations, but if you're after a combo that reaches the 900s, you'll find guns and mêlée weapons are probably more effective

And the simple matter is that the great majority of missions don't actually consist of these multitudes of enemies anyway. In fact the wide array of objectives, and the disparate playing styles that they engender is what is so refreshing about *Crimson Sea*. While one mission might see you racing an NPC to reach a target, another might see you attempting to pick up objects from a moving conveyor belt. Some levels even demand combat against unseen enemies, requiring the use of onscreen radar and controller rumbles to deduce their location, resulting in more pensive, though equally tense, encounters compared to those featuring multitudes.

If there are deficiencies, they are largely confined to a hokum plot, a control scheme that won't be to everyone's liking, and the relative brevity that seems to have afflicted all of this month's Japanese Xbox exclusives. But all things considered, this is another Xbox title that adds to a growing canon of quality coming out of Japan. Whether that will translate into commercial success is another matter entirely.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

Previously in E112, E117

















Choosing the right payload and acquiring plenty of new Neo-Psionic powers is essential to success, since mission goals are enormously varied, but to do so it's necessary to pick up currency hidden across levels

It's not all about combat. In some missions, it's more desirable to avoid drawn out confrontations because they get in the way of your objectives, such as chasing after a reclusive hermit (above)

First wave

Crimson Sea is among the first batch of titles that will be granted a European release by Koei itself. A recent deal saw THQ overseeing the PAL conversions and distribution of Koei titles in Europe, but prior to that the company's titles were only given piecemeal PAL releases by opportunist publishers. Even under the THQ deal, the company's titles have perhaps suffered commercially from being just one part of a broader portfolio. Hopefully the establishment of a European office will enable the company's line-up to enjoy a degree of commercial success that matches the company's considerable status in its homeland.

The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Nintendo** Developer: **In-house/Capcom** Price: **$30 (£19)** Release: **Out now (US), March 28 (UK)** Previously in **E119**









Ah, memories. Like reading a favourite novel for the third or fourth time, you might know exactly what's going to happen, but it's still wonderful



Zelda for dummies

A brief guide to the basics: the top-down adventure blends arcade combat with elementary item-based puzzle solving, all within an open tile-based world. The main quest comprises a series of dungeons, each of which gives access to a new weapon or item. Make progress, and more tools become available. Using them in combination helps our hero make his way to the increasingly ingenious bosses, and allows Link to access new areas of Hyrule.



The audio is one of the few things Capcom has changed; Link now issues forth little *Ocarina*-style yelps of delight and other short vocal signifiers. His inexplicably pink hair remains intact, thankfully

As an average **Edge** reader – not that **Edge** would ever consider you average, of course, but regardless – it's likely that you are in your mid-20s, and that you grew up with consoles, and that you're familiar with the high points of the 16bit era.

Arguably the highest point of all, Link's Super Famicom adventure was unmissable in 1991, and very little has changed. The Game Boy Advance conversion is, to all intents and purposes, identical, with the addition of a multiplayer game, Four Swords, and a new singleplayer dungeon for those who manage to complete the multiplayer quest.

This, presumably, is Nintendo's concession to those who feel that paying £35 for a decade-old game isn't really value for money. Essentially, it is *Phantasy Star Online* played with *Zelda* tools, with players (a minimum of two, a maximum of four) racing through a random arrangement of set-piece puzzles to rewards that can be shared or stolen. That is the crux of the entertainment, and some entertainment it is – but it's limited by the hardware.

To really get the most from Four Swords you need, well, four swords, four players, four copies of the game, and four GBAs with appropriate light sources. Nintendo's handheld is not as ubiquitous as the company would like, and while Link link-up is as frantic and fun as multiplayer games tend to be, it's simply not entertaining enough to justify that level of organisation or expense. It's a great bonus for those privileged to have a close circle of *Zelda*-obsessed friends, but for most people it won't justify the price of the cartridge; that it requires multiple cartridges may be good business sense, but appears miserly in the extreme.

Thankfully, the concession was never really necessary in the first place, because the singleplayer game is still as ludicrously addictive as it was eleven years ago. That's the thing; happy memories may take the edge off things that were unexpected the first time round, and the puzzles might be a question of recollection rather than intellect. But that's fine, because there isn't a single moment of *A Link to the Past*'s deliciously open adventure which isn't an absolute pleasure to revisit. And for those of you who've never played it before – that gloriously lucky, non-average handful of you – this will be bliss.

Edge rating: Nine out of ten

Ape Escape 2

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **SCEE** Developer: **In-house (SCEI)** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E118**

A*pe Escape 2* fixes the problems of the import-only *Ape Escape 2001* with a faster-moving, grander-scale revisitation of the preoccupations of the first game. Once again, players adopt the role of a bland but functional ape-catching boy, ensnare unspeakably cheeky monkeys with a variety of ingenious tools that exploit the DualShock2 set-up superbly, and pursue would-be world dominator Specter. Once again, there are extra out-of-reach monkeys to go back and find once the main game is complete, with extra weapons, item skins and minigames the incentives for your troubles. It is, of course, an absolute blast from start to finish.

There are 20 funny and pretty stages, seven boss levels, and almost 300 monkeys to catch in all, but somehow *Ape Escape 2* doesn't provide the depth of challenge that the original did. Beyond anything else, this disappointment may just be testament to the superb job *Ape Escape* did of its stated function of serving as an interactive guidebook to the future potential of the DualShock concept. Back in 1999, working out how to shoot, swim, steer or spin came with the force of a revelation; now, mastering a new piece of equipment barely even feels like an achievement. Still, that's not all bad: despite the numerous efforts made in the intervening years, the analogue sticks have rarely been used with such aplomb.

The old gadgets – club, net, dash hoop, sky flyer, catapult – still constitute the game's core toolkit and have lost none of their appeal, but the new arrivals and extra functions are delights to uncover. The opportunities to alternate between them, or to forget them for a stretch and hop into a vehicle or a robot suit, never falter. Getting stuck is barely an option. It's a non-stop drip-feed of software candy, and, as such, ought to be irresistible to the last, even to the most spoilt, attention-deficient gamer.

The monkeys are as fabulous as they ever were, their movements enhanced on PS2. Best of all, they are just as funny. So while the relative familiarity of the rest of the game may diminish the impact of some of its charms, the fact remains that, sooner or later, one gleeful taunt or other, one preposterous outfit or lewd boss encounter, will get to you – will make you laugh, deeply. While the original was about innovation, *Ape Escape 2*'s primary objective is to entertain. On those terms, it's almost a masterpiece.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten









Visuals are rarely less than pretty and there are some delightful touches and effects, but there's none of the showboating or filmic pretensions of recent big-name platformers such as *Jack and Daxter* or *Star Fox Adventures*. It's a refreshingly no-nonsense stance, albeit an uncommercial one



Super monkey balls too

Football, dancing and climbing minigames can all be unlocked in the hub area with coins collected in the main game. Monkey dancing, which uses analogue controls that recall *Cool Cool Toon*, is probably the most fun, but football, a five-a-side monstrosity that makes *SMB2*'s soccer look like *Pro Evo 2*, also comes laden with multiplayer and mode options. More inessential bonuses to be won include weapon upgrades and extra shells and new powers for the still-superb remote-control car.







It might have ruined a more pompous game, but SCEE's rogueish, 'Viz'-humour-meets-'Playschool'-voices localisation fits *Ape Escape* well. Monkey names and pick-ups blend daft pop-culture parody and in-jokes

Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance

Format: **Xbox (version tested), PS2, GC** Publisher: **Midway** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£40** Release: **February 14** Previously in **E**112









Midway is certainly to be commended for trying, but unfortunately, *Deadly Alliance* fails to match up to the competition on fairly basic counts

Kicking 'k'

Quite apart from the overuse of the kicking 'k', *Deadly Alliance* stays true to the origins of the series in several ways. Test Your Might minigames return (and now have some actual relevance thanks to prize 'koins' that unlock new characters and background artwork) joined by a new Test Your Sight game. But the shift to a polygonal visual style is underwhelming; the original digitised realism was aesthetically unique, giving character design a dark edge, and increasing the visceral impact of the gore. By contrast, fatalities are now limply comic.







Rote combos are the order of the day, though the timing of them isn't as precise as, say, *Virtua Fighter 4*. Fatalities are largely disappointing

There is a certain irony to be found in the fact that a genre which relies so heavily on frenetic violence should be approaching a state of structural moribundity. But the fundamental building blocks of the beat 'em up remain essentially identical to those that the original *Mortal Kombat* attempted to enliven with a profusion of gore several years ago. With the exploding viscera still firmly entrenched, *Deadly Alliance* attempts to reanimate the formula by allowing players to switch between three fighting styles during bouts. Unfortunately, this isn't sufficient to overcome some basic deficiencies.

Although it's not the first polygonal *Mortal Kombat* title, Midway has gone back to the drawing board and put considerable thought into the task of reinvigorating a series that has begun to look stale. With each character now possessing its own set of three fighting styles (each set of three includes one weapon style for easy access to claret) there's certainly a greater tactical dimension to kombat. In general, each style makes different demands, changing the range and effectiveness of attacks, but allowing greater offensive variety.

Another introduction is the singleplayer Konquest mode, obviously derived from *Soul Calibur*'s comprehensive mission-based structure, but unlike *Soul Calibur* the missions that make up Konquest are exclusively tutorials, frequently against static opponents. Consequently, it plays out a bit like a lengthy, tedious and witless version of *PaRappa the Rapper*, but without the funky tunes. So, the mainstay of the singleplayer game is again the Arcade mode, featuring successive bouts against increasingly difficult foes, but even here Midway hasn't got things quite right.

For a start the difficulty levels are lazily implemented, with early rounds requiring little more than the repeated use of a single move before the sudden introduction in later rounds of enemies gifted with supernaturally efficient reaction times. But more significant for a game that relies on rote combo learning, is that the timing feels slightly off compared to the precision of almost every other major franchise. Given such a flaw, the fact that a series of disappointing arenas almost all feature invisible walls is merely a sidenote.

So despite Midway's good intentions, it's again produced a title that's all style and no substance. That hasn't hindered the success of the series so far, but most gamers will be well aware of better alternatives.

Edge rating: **Four** out of **ten**

The Revenge of Shinobi

Format: Game Boy Advance Publisher: THQ Developer: 3d6 Price: $30 (£19) Release: Out now (US), April (UK)

You'd be forgiven for thinking this is a straight port of one of the earlier games in the series, Sega being busy with the PS2 regeneration of the franchise. But it's not, and it's not Sega, either. It handed development of one of the most well regarded side-scrollers ever to 3d6, and while the now-defunct developer clearly tried to clone the classic *Shinobi* jump/slash/shuriken blueprint, its version is a pale, sluggish copy of the dynamic originals. Backgrounds are static and faded, the key/switch exploration is dated, and combat is average, never thrilling. Even the quest, which takes you through a number of stages to find the 'elemental swords', appears to be a washed-out copy of one of the Game Gear adventures.

Not that all the problems are down to coding. The 16-letter code system is archaic, and while omitting a battery backup might be good way of saving money on THQ's part, it's annoying and prevents *Shinobi* from finding a niche in the pick-up-and-slash retail sector. As it is, it demands you to put some time aside to play, and have a pen handy to mark down your progress. But when an experience is as mundane as this, **Edge** can't see many people making the effort.

Edge rating: Three out of ten









Go here, hit that zombie, go there, pull that switch. The game is simple, but the controls are cumbersome – for example, going down stairs requires the player to press diagonally down at the right point in the floor, a feat which often takes several attempts

Super Monkey Ball Jr.

Format: Game Boy Advance Publisher: THQ Developer: Realism Studios Price: $30 (£19) Release: Out now (US), February (UK)

Previously in E115





The presence of the minigames will be welcomed, but the lack of Monkey Target – easily the most entertaining of the spinoffs in singleplayer – is bizarre. Monkey Bowling isn't as good as the GameCube version either, the pins dull and dead to even the most violent of collisions. A real shame





It's such a simple idea – rolling a ball around a maze – but it's so dependent on subtlety of movement that the concept of a *SMB* GBA conversion seems like part genius, part madness. How can you replicate the analogue control with eight-way digital? And if you can't, how can you expect the game to produce anything like the same mix of self-blame and elation?

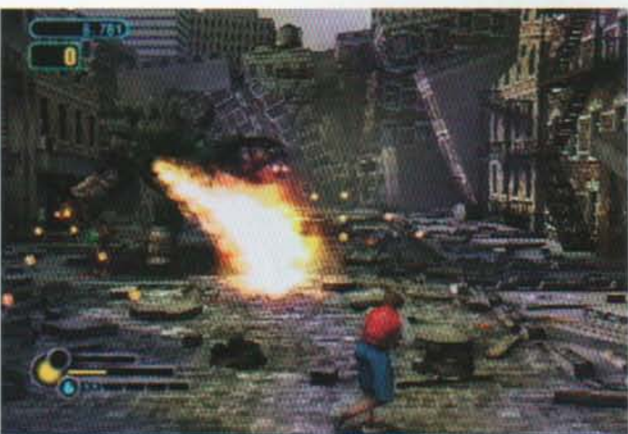
But the solution here nearly works. The game plays almost identically, with the exception that the board can be tipped at a greater angle by depressing one of the GBA's face buttons, allowing greater speeds and sharper turns. Visually it's as close as fans could hope for, all gentle curves and smooth polygons, albeit with slightly less complex mazes. It's just as tricky, though, because as smart as the control system is, it doesn't quite imply absolute control on the part of the player; when the monkey topples from the thinnest ledge, it doesn't feel like it's totally your fault anymore.

So, technically the game is brilliant, but the media does not suit the medium, and it's often frustrating as a result. Regardless, it still comes recommended, particularly for those whose handheld collection lacks the equivalent of a snack between meals.

Edge rating: Six out of ten

Space Raiders

Format: **PS2 (version tested), GC** Publisher: **Taito** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800 (£35)** Release: **Out now (Japan), TBC (UK)** Previously in **E**118









Spoiler alert. In a twist so ill-conceived it'd shame Shyamalan, it turns out the invaders see *you* as the invader, because of, oh, electromagnetic waves or something, and and if you could just skip to the end the denouement would probably make it into gaming's 'so bad it's good' infamy

Puzzle Bobble's lost its bounce, *Densha de Go*'s grinding to a halt, and so it's come to this. *Space Raiders* is a modern interpretation of *Space Invaders*, Taito's iconic shooter. 'Modern interpretation' means it's not exactly the same game – who'd buy a game limited to left and right and fire *these* days? – and it introduces many of the things that post-millennium gaming is so good at. Namely: bland 3D visuals, mindless thirdperson shooting, and a lack of imagination.

And a story, of course. 'Invaders came!' according to the 'World Times', which means it's just you and wave after wave of raiders. Make it to the end of one of the six (identical) environments and there's a crude, generic boss; Sellotape the fire button down and there's a fascinatingly bad cut-scene. But it's unlikely many will have the patience to get that far.

More specific frustrations? Raiders that spawn level with the player are almost impossible to dispose of, the combo system doesn't create any sophistication and even the *controls* are broken. If you move slightly off the X axis with the analogue stick the character slows to a crawl. Genuinely, Taito, how hard is it to get left, right, fire right? **Edge** would really like to know.

Edge rating: Two out of ten

Mr Driller Drill Land

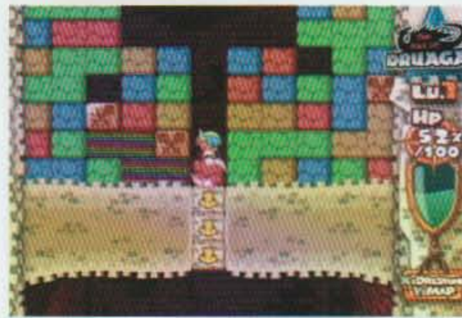
Format: **GameCube** Publisher: **Namco** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800 (£35)** Release: **Out now (Japan), TBC (UK)** Previously in **E**117

Be the ball," advised Chevy Chase in 'Caddyshack'. He was right, there are some games where you need to let go, forget about the mechanics of perfect execution and simply lose yourself to the more spiritual forces at play. Getting into the zone, in other words. *Mr Driller* fans will know all about this; they will be familiar with the euphoria that clearing a 5,000ft depth induces and they will be on synaptic terms with the logic patterns that emerge when coloured bricks begin to form and fall.

But here there's more structure and variety than before. There's five themed games with ever increasing difficulty levels. There's the cute Star Driller and Driller World Tour modes and there's also the clever Hole of Druaga game, in which you have to use crystals to defeat monsters and unlock doors. But **Edge**'s favourites are the Horror Night House (vampire bats must be defeated by drilling for holy water) and Drindy Adventure (an Indiana Jones pastiche where you must collect golden idols and avoid falling rocks). A frantic multiplayer mode and unlockables from the local Mr Driller shop round things off superbly. But remember, don't think – be the drill.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten









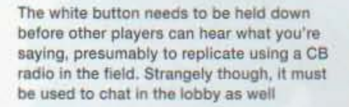
Drindy Adventure (left) is one of the better games. Collecting the golden idols is not as easy as it seems. Traps beset your every move and rocks will roll down the passageways you've produced and can crush the life out of the greedy hero



Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon (Xbox Live)

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Ubi Soft** Developer: **Red Storm Entertainment** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E**112





The white button needs to be held down before other players can hear what you're saying, presumably to replicate using a CB radio in the field. Strangely though, it must be used to chat in the lobby as well







The PC iteration of *Ghost Recon* has a reputation for intelligent, strategic squad-based combat – something thought to be a tough proposition in a console environment. Happily, the arrival of *Ghost Recon* on Xbox shows this notion no longer holds water. An intuitive map allows for easy manipulation of allied AI, and the realistic skirmishes that typified the original are all here. Extra maps from the PC expansion pack make for a hefty package too.

It's the Xbox Live component that's of most interest, however. Voice communication enriches most online experiences, but it's of particular benefit here, where co-operation with your team is paramount. Playing online on either the Veteran or Elite settings proves a fearsomely tense experience, and it's often only thanks to the verbal intervention of a friend that you'll get through a battle alive. Life is precious in *Ghost Recon*, making for some brilliantly nervy confrontations.

The only problem is that the game can suffer from lag when hosting more than six players on a standard 512Kbps DSL connection – something a broadband-only network was supposed to eradicate. Still, this is Xbox Live's most exciting experience yet.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten

Unreal Championship (Xbox Live)

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Infogrames** Developer: **Digital Extremes** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E**107, **E**112, **E**119

It goes without saying that *Unreal Championship* should be 18-rated – not because of the gore, but because of the creative but ultimately filthy expletives that echo across the headset with every death. And oh, you'll die often at first, but it's much more enjoyable online, because each kill you manage means there's someone swearing somewhere else. Slowdown isn't as much of a problem as it is in splitscreen, games with too much lag can be filtered out on the match-selection screen, and it's easy to find an available game with rules to suit you. However, finding one in which all the players obey those rules is getting increasingly difficult.

There is a glitch that allows players to receive infinite ammo for the most powerful gun in the game, the TAG rifle. Now, while there's always the chance that Digital Extremes will issue a patch, **Edge** isn't sure if that's possible. What is more certain is that now the secret's out it'll infect players like a virus, and the only way to be sure of a good game will be to play with people you know. Which is a shame, because the real thrill in *Unreal* comes with testing your skill against unfamiliar intelligence – and if you can't find that, then the experience is somewhat neutered.

Edge rating: Six out of ten









While it's commendable that two players can play online on one machine (something that *Ghost Recon* sadly lacks), the onscreen notation disappears, so you can't see who you've killed or who's killing you



MotoGP: URT (Xbox Live)

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **THQ** Developer: **Climax Brighton** Price: **£45** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E**105, **E**110, **E**112

RedEye's **E**118 column already revealed the main reason why *MotoGP* Live is such a sweet toy. When you're 14th from 16, you're still a Winner, and those losers in 15th and 16th place are Losers. On an instant scale every place matters, and on a race-by-race scale every tenth of a second is another 100 places up the world leaderboard. Unfortunately, they're only a rough guide to your excellence; those at the top of the boards will have taken shortcuts on the easiest settings. It's a flaw, but my no means a fatal one.

Of course, any online community has its problem kids, but *MotoGP*'s can prove the most irritating of all. Going the wrong way around the circuit is typical behaviour, and there are few things more frustrating than striking a barricade of giggling teenagers when you're on the home straight. It's easy for those running the game to throw reprobates out, and there's more of this here than there is on *Unreal Championship* – but, like *Unreal*, the only way to be sure of a fair game is to play against friends. That everyone with Xbox Live owns a version of the game makes this more likely, and when the engine purrs and you make that 14th place, the beauty of the game is perfectly apparent.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten









MotoGP limits the voice aspect of Xbox Live so that, outside of the lobby, you can only hear three people: those immediately in front and behind you, and one other. While it makes for confusing conversations during overtaking, it does leave you free to concentrate your trash-talking on one specific opponent

MechAssault (Xbox Live)

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Microsoft** Developer: **Day 1 Studios** Price: **£45** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E**112, **E**118





The problems of a linear structure are largely overcome – or at least forgivable – once online, yet *MechAssault* still feels, well, mechanical. Battering buildings and enemies can still be satisfying, if you're prepared for a few rants and tantrums

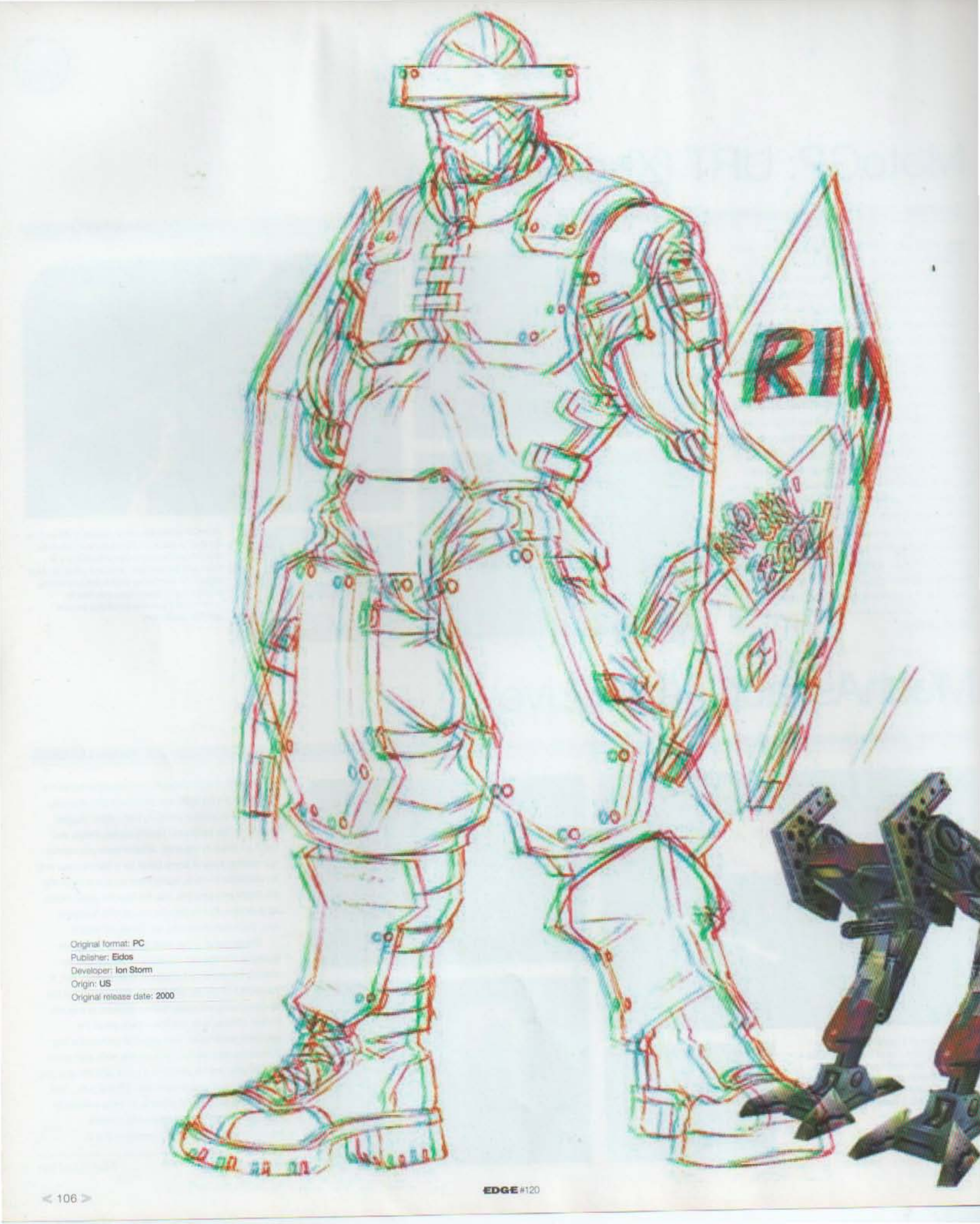




Best bit of *MechAssault* Live? Seeing a rocket the size of a car just miss your mech and slam into the side of a building, reducing it to rubble. Biggest problem? The petulance. Mechs are big things, and don't go down in one shot, which means you can be hammering away at some beast for a few minutes, only for someone to nip in, shoot them once and claim the kill. That's annoying but, hey, it's how the game works for everyone. But as soon as you do it to someone else, the screaming starts: kill-stealer, kill-stealer…

MechAssault is the most frustrating Live game available. It brings out the worst in people, and so attracts the worst sort of people to its servers. But, if you were just to play with friends, and accept that the kill-claim setup will cause some moments of anguish, it's fine. Simple, sure, but fine – there are all the standard game types, teamplay and capture the flag derivatives, and plenty of bots to play with, and you're stomping on real life people in a metal tank the size of a skyscraper, and what's not to like? It's fine, just… fine. Fine, and outclassed on either side: it sits awkwardly between *Ghost Recon*'s tactics and *Unreal*'s freneticism, offering no real incentive to buy it.

Edge rating: Five out of ten



Original format: PC
Publisher: Eidos
Developer: Ion Storm
Origin: US
Original release date: 2000

The making of...

Deus Ex

How Ion Storm's seminal cyberpunk adventure saw off internal wranglings, impossibly inflated ambitions and shadowy interventions from the US government to become one of the most respected PC titles of all time

Very rarely do great games spark into life, perfectly realised at conception. Most struggle for existence, mutating ceaselessly as they gestate. But *Deus Ex* may well be one of videogaming's most complicated pregnancies.

"I started thinking about a game like *Deus Ex* when I was with Origin in 1994," begins **Warren Spector**. "I was tired of fantasy and science fiction and wanted to do something more down-to-earth, more grounded in reality. A few years later, John Romero offered me the opportunity to join Ion Storm and make 'the game of my dreams.' In addition to wanting to relieve a little personal boredom, I thought a more believable setting and a more freeform approach to gameplay would appeal to people





who might never consider playing something designed by and for hardcore gamers."

Romero's was something of a brave proposition. By this time Spector was at Looking Glass Technologies – the innovative development studio behind *Thief* and *System Shock*, which was about to go belly-up due partly to its perfectionist dogma. And here was another epic undertaking. But in September 1997, Spector and half a dozen ex-Looking Glass colleagues drafted the first *Deus Ex* design document and Eidos agreed to fund the project.

"I was watching a tester play on the PS2 version, and he did something I'd never seen anyone do before. I just about died"

Although the commitment to an open gameplay experience – with multiple methods of completing each mission – was there at the beginning, the early story draft would be unrecognisable to *Deus Ex* veterans. "The original plot was this sprawling, crazy thing with 25 missions in all," explains Spector. "There was a big mission series all about a plot to take over the government by driving it into a state of emergency. This would call into play a variety of executive orders, which would in turn create a shadow government in Mount Weather in Green Brier estate.

"And that's all real. One of the designers read about Mount Weather on a Website somewhere and said it should be in the game. There really are these executive orders that have been passed since the Eisenhower administration that say, 'Here's what's gonna happen in the state of national emergency.' And I started reading the conspiracy theories surrounding them, and did a legal search. I had a lawyer go and get a copy of the original executive orders – she could probably get fired. And it's all true. Recently when an announcement came that there was this shadow government in operation, congress was going, 'This is an outrage. How could we not have known?' And everyone in the studio was going, 'We knew about that three years ago!'"

There were also plans to include the White House as an explorable location, and when it emerged that these had been cut, Internet speculation about government intervention was rife. "There were rumours going around that we deleted the White House because we were too close to reality. In fact, we did discover some really interesting things about the building. When putting together pieces of blueprint and public images and maps from various sources, we thought, 'Hey wait, there's a little hole here, and we don't know what's in there.' None of the maps identify it, but there's a space that has to be filled with something. I think we really did hit on some weird stuff, but we cut the mission because we realised that a few thousand little square rooms would be really boring – we didn't pull it out because the government made us."

But Spector admits there were interactions between Ion Storm and the authorities. "We did get some secret services guy contacting Ion at one point – I'm not sure what that was all about. And we were contacted by one government agency after we put up unatco.com [a teaser deliberately designed to look like an authentic government Website]. We linked to some totally innocuous government agencies from the site and the day we went live one of them got so many hits we brought their server down. We got calls from their lawyers…"

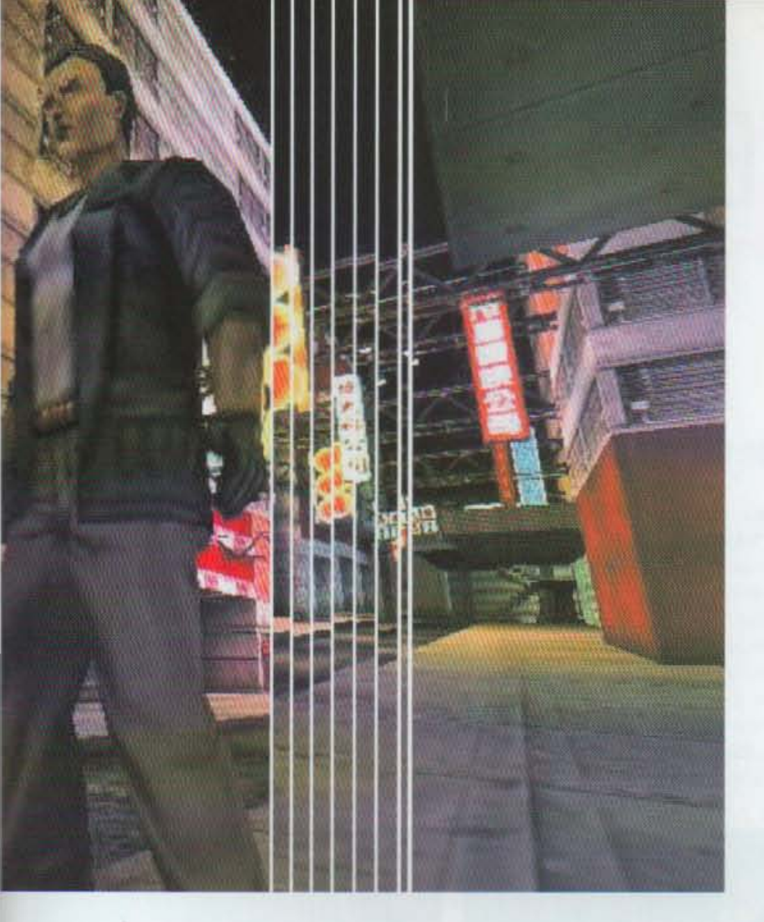
Along with Washington, further locations were purged. A visit to Russia, an abandoned space station, a moon base – all, according to Spector, jettisoned as the design tightened. "We redid much of the plot mid-way through development, when the designers realised our original story, in its totality, was inexpressible given our technology." Other late changes would follow. "After blindtesting by some other studios, we redesigned the skill and augmentation







Dark, gloomy characters (including nano-enhanced anti-terrorist agent JC Denton) from *Deus Ex*'s dark, gloomy world. Check out www.edge-online.com in the near future for extra material



systems fairly dramatically. And I think we were early in beta when we realised that we hadn't planned things so players encountered NPCs several times – players weren't establishing relationships with the characters so the story lacked resonance. We made a major pass at the plot so folks from early missions showed up again and again. That was a critical moment in the game's development and it came very late."

Born free

Even the central concept of open simulation had to be gradually rethought. "At first, we wanted to get openness from a deep simulation of relatively small spaces. The idea was to give players lots of tools so the core ideas of choice, consequence and player freedom would naturally follow. We ended up with more expansive spaces than anticipated, a less robust simulation, more traditional game systems and more designer-crafted situations. It all worked, I think, but it wasn't exactly what we intended."

Despite amendments, the multiple solution structure was still revolutionary – easy to forget these days, when every other game offers both stealth and combat components as a standard selling point. And as lead designer **Harvey Smith** recalls, there was still plenty of real freedom available to players. "Later, we recognised that some solutions were embedded by the designers as special case solutions, while others sprang emergently from the rules of our simulations. Players figured out how to open locked doors by killing explosive enemies near them, saving their lockpicking resources. Players figured out how to climb walls by attaching and hopping up onto lamprey-like proximity mines, escaping the map confines. Those are great moments in test, watching that stuff happen."

"Yeah, watching testers 'break' the game was terrific," continues Spector. "Our goal, remember, was to get the designers off the stage and the players on it, so we *had* to embrace the idea that players would find ways to do things we never expected. I was watching a tester play through a mission on the PS2 version, more than a year after we shipped on the PC and he did something I'd never seen anyone do before. I just about died. I thought by that point I'd seen everything, but there he was, in mission one, trying something new to deal with a game problem – and it worked. That was awesome."

Reality, only bigger

Deus Ex ended up containing 12 huge missions, organised into 79 maps. The story takes nano-augmented anti-terrorist agent JC Denton from New York to Hong Kong to Paris, as he hunts down – and eventually joins – a terrorist group known as the National Secessionist Forces (NSF). Although set in the mid-21st century the plot makes painstaking references to real events, organisations and research, building a dense, compelling universe. As Spector confirms, "Almost everything in the game is based on a little snippet of research in some lab somewhere, or a 'real' conspiracy. There's stuff in *Deus Ex* that is literally ripped from headlines." Indeed, there are timely references to David Rockefeller's controversial economics think-tank The Trilateral Commission, to the increasing power of global corporations, and to intellectual protest groups such as Adbusters.org (a clear influence on Silhouette) – all supported with facts and stats taken from contemporary sources.

Most importantly, the game is prophetic in its exploration of biological warfare and global terrorism. Sometimes Spector found that his team was closer than it realised. "The creepiest thing was after September 11, one of the artists sent an email around – the guy that had done the skybox for the New York map. He said, 'You know, it was an accident, but did anyone notice that I left out the twin towers from the skyline?'"

Behind the scenes, the enormous ambition of even the cut-down narrative created a beast that Ion Storm had a hard time taming. "The team ended up being very factional," remembers Smith. "We basically had three different groups, trying to craft three different games. *Deus Ex* was born of that conflict." Spector concurs, "The idea that we could provide a little something for everyone, regardless of what playstyle they preferred *did* grow out of some occasionally hairy internal struggles. Frankly, I've often felt like the most important thing I did on *Deus Ex* was prevent a fractious team of incredibly talented people from killing one another!"

While the team wrestled with plot details and internal conflicts, technical issues were also creating problems. As Smith says, "AI was one of the major challenges. It's not just a world of enemies and allies; some of the units change alliance based on the player's actions. This complicates things drastically. I long to make a game where everyone hates you." But the efforts were vital. "There's a moment where you meet up with your brother and, if you'd killed a bunch of people in the last mission, he'd start the conversation by saying, 'You jackass!' And people just flipped out about that – that he was taking a moral stance, that he was aggressive, and that it was dynamic based on their actions. We speculated that this would be very powerful and it was. It reminds the player that they're in control."

Plot and theme

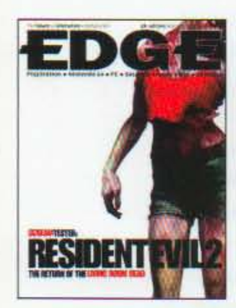
Visuals are hardly ever mentioned in discussions about *Deus Ex*. Spector says there were problems grafting the RPG gameplay onto the licensed Unreal engine – a piece of code designed for fast-paced shooters rather than epic adventures. The use of hand-animated characters is also looked upon as something of a disaster. But really, this was always a game about plot and theme and atmosphere. As with 8bit classics such as *Elite* and *Lords of Midnight*, players filled in what was missing, imagined elements that weren't there – because the framework was so compelling, so beautifully, soulfully wrought. Most importantly, *Deus Ex* touches on our real fears about the world and how it is run. The truth, muddied by conspiracy, shrouded by double think, is always just beyond our reach.

RESET

Where yesterday's gaming goes to have a lie down

reload

Examining gaming history from **Edge**'s perspective, five years ago this month



Issue 56, March 1998

If Edge's bias is the weather, then the **Edge** letters page is the two-minute weather report that sits next to the news. Things were stormy back in **E**56, for sure: **Edge** is biased towards Sony, **Edge** is biased towards electronic music, **Edge** is biased against… the Archimedes? Hrm. But a five-page interview with Phil Harrison would only make the Nintendo zealots (suffering a furious *Turismo* hangover) even angrier, despite the Sony marketing man failing to reveal anything about… well, anything, really.

Still, the recruitment advert seeking a deputy art editor gave **Edge** a chance to indulge in some seriously creative writing: "**Edge** is offering a talented individual the opportunity to join its editorial team, working in a modern, friendly environment within the pleasant surroundings of Bath".

But the cutest part of the mag was in hot-or-not column Game On/Game Over, where **Edge** criticised poor journalism in 'Empire': "If blagging free games, at least take the time to review them properly. Alternatively, freelance them to **Edge**". Well it would have done, but **Edge** is biased, remember?



DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?

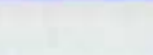
"I have always respected Nintendo. But I don't think its latest product offering lived up to either the marketing hype or my personal expectations." Do you think SCEA vice president of Third Party Relations Phil Harrison might *possibly* have a vested interest?

DID EDGE REALLY SAY THAT?

"A game is a far more emotional experience than, say, a dishwasher, and perhaps the time has come for scores to be removed altogether." **Edge** presents its most compelling argument for dropping scores thus far.

TESTSCREENS (AND RATINGS)

Resident Evil 2 (PS, 9/10); *Fighters Destiny* (N64, 8/10); *One* (PS, 6/10); *Ultimate Race Pro* (PC, 6/10); *Ore Tomba!* (PS, 6/10)

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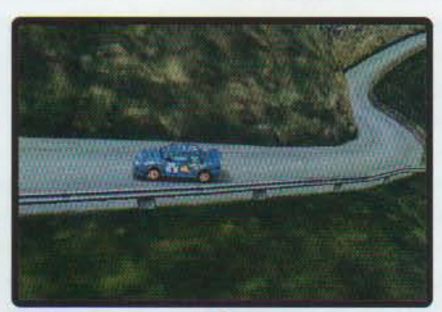
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6

1. *Resident Evil 2*: more blood, shorter shorts 2. Suddenly the Xbox pad seems practically petite 3. John Carmack, freestyle coding 4. *Beatmania* launches in Japan to a mixers reception 5. *Colin McRae*, five years ago. Oh how times have changed 6. *Get Bass* – Sega was killing subaquatic life long before *Seaman* showed Sega's sensitive side

pixelperfect

Trying to find the special game




Jarvis' first love: "There was really no game that touched it for the next 15 years or so"

THE GAME is kind of like figuring out which of your past loves was really THE ONE. There's *EverQuest* which started 3D online life wasting; the marathon RTS mayhem of *Age of Empires*; the brute savagery of *Doom*; the obsessive-compulsive addiction of *Tetris*, and of course the ever accelerating robotic mania of *Space Invaders*. These games have all claimed months, even years of joyful productivity loss from my life. But there is something special about your first true love and for me it was *Spacewar!*. It was the original deathmatch.

I first encountered it in the basement of the old physics lab in Berkeley, running on an old IBM 704 punch card machine that took up the better part of the room. Sometimes to boot up the beast you had to shake a couple of the circuit boards which held a whole one bit of memory each. But once it was running you were sucked into the fantasy of one on one space combat. No artificial intelligence, or should we say artificial stupidity of computer opponents, it was human vs human, a fight to the death in cyberspace. And like today's games there were myriad options to shake things up like anti-gravity, repelling borders, and rogue suns.

As for me when I emerged from that basement, and early evening had turned to dawn, I had glimpsed the future, and a gamer was born.

FAQ

Chris Sorrell

Creative director, SCEE (Cambridge Studios)

Sorrell and his team should be putting the finishing touches to *Primal* as you read this (review expected next month). Although responsible for overseeing the creative development of the game, being a programmer at heart ensured that Sorrell also spent plenty of his time coding. Past works include *MediEvil* and its sequel, the *James Pond* series on the Amiga and Mega Drive and several Amiga/ST titles.

What was the first videogame you played?
Miner2049er. The only game I owned for about six months – I got so that I could practically play it in my sleep.

What was the first computer/games machine you owned?
An Atari 400 – the one with the lovely membrane keyboard.

What was the first thing you ever created for a computer or console?
A C64 vertically scrolling shoot 'em up – written using a typed-in-from-magazine-listing machine code monitor.

What was your first job in the industry, and what was the first thing you ever designed?
As a freelance artist creating visuals (in D-Paint!) for a beat 'em up based on the 'Spitting Image' television series. My first design (at least the first one that made it to a completed product) was *James Pond*.

What's your favourite game ever, and why?
I'm not particularly good with favourites, but in recent times, my favourite game is probably *Ico*. It managed to shrug off convention to create a unique and beautiful gaming experience.

What was the last game you played, and what did you think of it?
Ratchet & Clank. I didn't like Ratchet, but I loved Clank. I've always enjoyed platform games, and this is an immaculately executed example. Technically and graphically it's stunning and demonstrates how 'next gen' platformers should look (as opposed to *Mario Sunshine* which in my opinion looks more N64 than GameCube – although undeniably the gameplay magic's still there).

How many hours a week do you actually spend playing games?
At the moment, zero I'm afraid. When less busy, certainly four or five.

What's the first game you look for when you walk into an arcade?
One of those *Whack-a-Croc* games with the hammer: "Now I'm angry!"

What's your favourite book, album, and film of all time?
Book: 'Carter Beats the Devil' by Glen David Gold (a recent favourite at least). Album: NiN – 'The Downward Spiral'. Film: hard to choose, but possibly 'Being John Malkovich' for its out-there oddness.

Which Website do you most regularly visit?
No one site more than others, but perhaps darkhorizons.com for film/TV news. Plus the usual news/gaming sites.

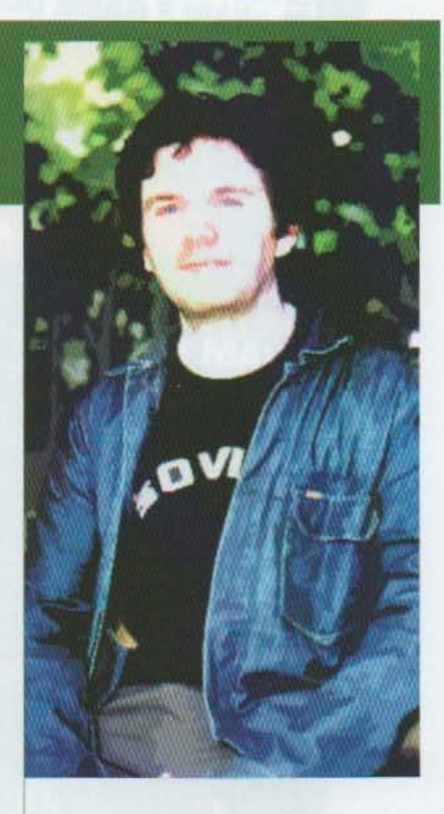
What game would you most like to have worked on?
Mario 64. To see how Nintendo ticks and specifically how Miyamoto works his mojo.

Of all the games you've been involved in in the past, what's your favourite, and why?
I'd have to say *James Pond 2 – Codename: Robocod*. It only took about nine months to create, was developed with an almost bedroom-coding mentality, little expectation of success, and came together to be something really fun. It's nice that many people seem to remember it fondly. *MediEvil*'s probably a close second.

"BMX XXX is disappointing. Our industry is sexist enough without major publishers putting out puerile junk like this"

What stage is your current project at?
Primal is at the stage where I can see the light at the end of the tunnel and I'm just hoping it's not a train.

Which aspect of it do you think will impress players the most?
If I have to say a single thing, I'd say the game's personality. We've put a huge amount of effort into bringing our characters to life, giving them charm and depth, trying to stamp the whole thing with a unique identity. *Primal* is the product of a talented team, a huge amount of hard work, and some creative risk-taking – always an interesting mix I believe.



What new development in videogames would you most like to see?
An IMAX home cinema in every household. I wish we could make game-worlds more immersive somehow… I think the confines of the TV screen are very limiting.

What disappoints you about the industry?
The fact that products like *BMX XXX* exist. Our industry is sexist enough without major publishers putting out puerile junk like this.

What do you enjoy most about working in the videogame industry?
The combination of creative opportunity and technical challenge; the fact that what we do is always changing and evolving.

Whose work do you most admire?
Probably Naughty Dog – its technologies are always astonishing and the sheer focus and hard-graft it invests into making its games is incredible.

What new gaming platform are you most looking forward to?
PS3, obviously.

What are your thoughts on mobile phone gaming?
It could be fun once phones with decent screens and game-friendly input devices are the norm – but only for 'distraction' gaming – I certainly don't see this taking over from console gaming any time soon.



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edge@futurenet.co.uk

Curtis Jewell brought up a very important issue in relation to the differences between casual and hardcore gamers. As it is the subject of my dissertation, I thought I could help to shed some light on the issue. One thing that must be noted, however, is that a gamer's skill level has very little to do with being classified within either denomination, because gamers with any degree of experience would be expected to be better than any non-gamer (or a gamer with less experience).

In basic terms, hardcore gamers are believed to be more fluent in their understanding of what makes a good game good and what makes a bad one bad. This is, of course, deeply flawed due mainly to the fact that the attitude for which casual gamers are mostly derided – that of being graphics whores – has always been the aim of the industry. The term has also been subject to change in recent times and will continue to be in the future.

This does beg the question: where does that leave the developers, bedroom coders and games collectors in all of this? They are neither hardcore or casuals because they have totally different perspectives. There really is no 'hardcore' or 'casual' in the real world, the distinction just resides in the minds of those that really want to care.
Juggernaut Toops

The hardcore/casual distinction continues to be a problematic one, but the rather obvious fact remains that there are different types of gamers, who appreciate different types of games. Perhaps what the debate does show is that the videogame industry continues to suffer from a lack of a standard vocabulary with which to discuss the medium and its adherents.

Your review of *The Getaway* seems to have misread the game's 'humour'. Its humour comes from parodying the whole mockney gangster angle. The homage's ironic strength comes from the fact that its character's have no saving graces, they are morally repugnant thugs, not the cheekie chappies as portrayed by 'Get Carter', 'Lock Stock' et al.

The fact that most people don't know how to get from Hyde Park to Whitechapel is a more fundamental problem.
Steven Gray

Right. It's not very funny though, is it?

I was looking through **E**119 today and I was really shocked by something I read in your preview of Capcom's new game, *P.N.03*. At the end of the article it read, "*P.N.03* could turn out to be a victory of style and sheer fun over substance. Sometimes, that is enough." The problem I have with that is that I can't see how it should ever be "enough" for a game to have substance but play like shit. Personally, I think the way that gaming has evolved into an almost now completely 3D-based medium is such a shame.

With the Game Boy Advance now reminding us all how amazing some of those Super Nintendo classics were it just seems bizarre to me that 2D gaming has pretty much been replaced by 3D gaming. I think the two are so different that they should really just be different genres of gaming rather than ages of gaming.

Isn't the whole purpose of gaming the interactivity? I don't want a pretty film to watch that I can control slightly (*Final Fantasy X*, *Metal Gear Solid 2*). I want games that are fun to play regardless of how they look. I hate the fact that *Mario*, *Zelda*, *Metroid* and *Sonic* have all been forced into becoming 3D. Why does the new *Metroid* look like *Halo*? They might still play well, but they're different and I really miss the feel of their Super Nintendo versions. I look at my Nintendo 64 and I hate it; I wish it never existed.

I'm not against new games; I love *Resident Evil 0* for example, but I just think that it's so different to a game like *Probotector Alien Rebels* for the Super Nintendo it seems ridiculous that one should replace the other. I think games are getting graphically better all the time, but why should this mean a step towards realism and away from playability. I think the new *Zelda* game shows that games don't have to look realistic anymore, but at the same time, I prefer the look of the Super Nintendo *Zelda* over this new cel-shaded look without question. I know many people agree.

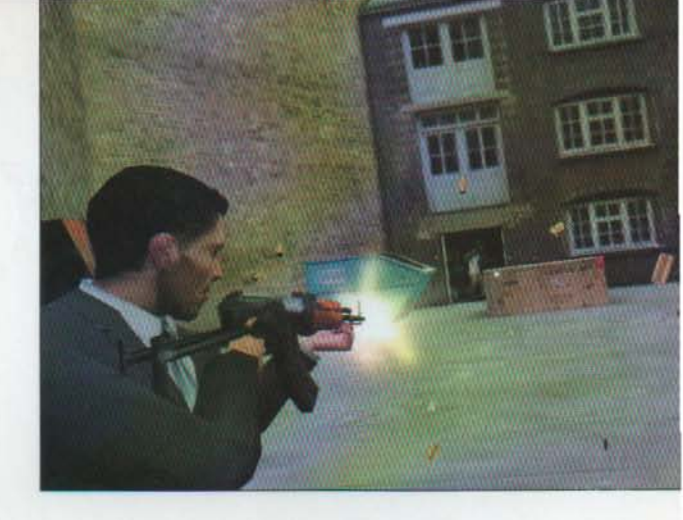
So why isn't there a single console in Europe or America which isn't primarily based for 3D gaming any more? Japan knows the market is there, so why doesn't anyone else?
Nick Blackford

As for your comment regarding *P.N.03*, perhaps you misunderstand our point. Lightweight, disposable gameplay is not always synonymous with poor gameplay. But **Edge** shares your disappointment that the rise of 3D gaming has effectively meant the end of 2D gaming. Recent games like *Bangai-o* demonstrate the scope for innovation, and *Metal Slug* the scope for refinement. As you point out, the Game Boy Advance provides some respite. Ultimately though, publishers are to a certain extent at the mercy of the market, and it would seem, unfortunately, as if there simply isn't one in the west.

Re: inbox, letters from Curtis Jewell and David O'Connell, **E**119. The solution here is obvious: stop playing long, complicated games that require time and dogged determination to complete and merely read the informed opinion of someone paid to do so. Consider the advantages of reading something like **Edge** as opposed to actually buying all significant formats and games: it costs less than a fiver a month, takes about three hours to complete if read carefully (with bonus final graphic guaranteed), the text is grammatically correct and engaging, the amount of information about any game or series far surpasses what you could learn yourself by playing that game (and there is no way a single player could conceivably play all the games featured in a single issue). Stock up on obscure factoids with which to impress your friends (if applicable) and, of course, enjoy high resolution 2D graphics (3D if you include the embossing). I am sure that even Curtis' mum could

"So why isn't there a single console in Europe or America which isn't primarily based for 3D gaming any more? Japan knows the market is there, so why doesn't anyone else?"

The Getaway. Ironic pastiche of the mockney gangster movie (Steven Gray), or a damning indictment of the videogame script writer's art?



bluff her way through an evening of games-related chat by reading her son's last five issues and browsing a few walkthroughs.
David Sorfa

At least somebody enjoyed the embossing.

In reply to my letter last month, you advised me to realise the quality of games around me. I had mentioned previous "definitive" gaming experiences and stated I wanted games to provide more ingenuity. I mentioned the experience of games like *Panzer Dragoon*, *Shenmue*, *Super Mario 64*; the list is long and wonderful. In reply **Edge** you pointed me to this year's experiences – the quality software which could and should provide this year's defining experience.

Unfortunately I must disagree. I have played all of *Splinter Cell*, *The Two Towers* and *TimeSplitters2* and I am still left dissatisfied, and would be even more so given that this is the climax to the year's gaming. *Splinter Cell* was like walking down a long pretty corridor with the ability to climb the odd pipe here and there. *The Two Towers* I felt was similar. Reasonable play mechanics dressed in pretty clothes. *TimeSplitters2* reminded me too much of *TimeSplitters* to provoke a response even nearing the emotional. And here lies my point.

As a teen with a life punctuated by gaming, many of my gaming experiences are remembered as emotion. I recall the emotion of playing *Shenmue* right through the holiday; I recall falling in love with *NiGHTS* a long time ago. Games always nurtured my imagination. But as I approach manhood I approach it alone, without an emotional gaming counterpart. Unbelievably videogames seem to have lost their imagination. Your recommendations are so badly disappointing. The only thing I can deduce from them is that certain companies are learning the art of the good sequel, and that EA is nearly making quality games. But what about originality? Where are the young Miyamotos (as it would appear the old Miyamoto is even wavering with a less than fantastical and revolutionary *Mario* recently). What happens in the next year decides my relationship with my favourite pastime. Certain games like *Viewtiful Joe*, *O.TO.GI* and *Sudeki* have caught my eye in recent issues and so perhaps the east will rescue my spirit next year. Here's to a revolutionary new year, hope I'll see you there.
David Valjalo

Edge didn't point you to the year's defining videogames, merely to a representative example of the surfeit of high-quality titles that were available over the Christmas period. And though you're correct to highlight the linearity of *Splinter Cell* or *The Two Towers*, neither title is more so than *Shenmue*, which you rightfully praise. Perhaps you really are getting too old for gaming if you can't see the highlights of last year's software line-up. Which is an issue that **Edge** hopes to explore fully in a future issue.

What a great time it is to love games. Please **Edge** no more letters from whingers going on about how games are no fun anymore, etc. After over 20 years of serious game playing I can honestly say I have never had it so good. A smörgåsbord of great games to play and amazing machines to play them on. My Dreamcast still gets a fair work out these days and the PlayStation2 and Xbox play host to some fantastic games.

To my mind, though, Nintendo has really scored a goal with the GameCube. The excitement of playing the big 'Cube games this year was not matched by the other platforms.
Duncan MacBeth

That's more like it. Apart from the bit about the GameCube, which has had a terrific year – unless you're a PAL gamer.

Upon first hearing about large videogame companies creating games for phones I failed to see any real point in it, considering all the other available platforms. But I have since realised that they could quite possibly introduce many people to the wonders of gaming.

I bought *Super Mario Sunshine* a few weeks ago and consider it to be one of the best games I have ever played, (not sure if it beats *Super Mario 64* yet but time will tell.) However, when I try and explain the brilliance of it and demonstrate it to my non-gaming friends, they are generally underwhelmed by it. Even when tell them the relative affordability of it and show them all the other available games they are still unimpressed.

Last week I bought a new phone,(Sharp GX10), which cost almost the same as a GameCube and *Super Mario Sunshine*. It comes with four games ready to play and you can download *Pac-Man* and *Space Invaders* among others. When I showed my same friends the phone they thought the games available on it were fantastic and were hooked within a few minutes of play. These friends even thought the price was reasonable considering everything it does and now whenever I see them, the first thing they ask is if they can have a go on my phone. This preference over *Mario* seemed criminal to me, an avid gamer for as long as I can remember, but at the same time I thought it might actually lead them into 'gaming proper', should games companies create the right games for phones. For example, if Nintendo released a version of *Mario* for phones I'm almost certain my friends would love it and it could act as a stepping stone to console gaming.

I can't see mobile phones ever overtaking or even coming close to console gaming but it seems to be a very real opportunity to introduce people to some fantastic gaming experiences. And if nothing else it is currently more socially acceptable to play games on your phone in public than it would be, to say, take your GBA down to your local.
Phillip Copes

Which is no doubt what many publishers are hoping. In **Edge**'s opinion, reaching the massmarket with simple, addictive games can only be a good thing.

"After over 20 years of serious game playing I can honestly say I have never had it so good. A smörgåsbord of great games to play and amazing machines to play them on"



If you too are getting increasingly bored with today's videogame offerings then perhaps you should try investing in an old classic like the Saturn

After recently getting bored of the latest range of next-generation consoles I decided to re-purchase my old favourite, the Sega Saturn. And in regard to your 'Three Kings' article I will just say this: don't spend hundreds of pounds on one of the new consoles with various games, DVD handsets and the like; just pick up a Saturn for about £20 secondhand, with classic games for around £2–5 each.

I've been lucky enough to own a PlayStation2, Xbox and GameCube over the last couple of years but I can honestly say that on all three of the above machines I have never played a racing game with handling or tracks as masterful as those in *Sega Rally*. Or a horror/adventure game with the atmosphere of the original *Resident Evil* or *D*. Or a shoot 'em up as good as *Panzer Dragoon Zwei* or *Radiant Silvergun*. Or an RPG as good as *Shining Force 3* or *Panzer Dragoon Saga*. Or a 2D fighter as good as *King of the Fighters 97*. Or a puzzle game as good as *Super Puzzle Fighter 2 Turbo*. Or any action games as innovative and down right fun as *NiGHTS*, *Burning Rangers* or *Sonic R*.

To put it simply, to be this good takes ages. So pick up a Saturn and then sit back and wonder why you didn't discover all its classic games back in 1995. You won't regret it.
Alex Gladwin

Remember kids, a console's for life, not just for Christmas. But if you have thrown out your old collections, then you could always look into titles such as *Panzer Dragoon Orta*, or *Ikaruga*.

It fascinates me as to why some people buy magazines such as **Edge**. I buy them because I enjoy reading about my favourite hobby. But so many of them carry letters disagreeing with review scores. Now this is the right of the purchaser and we do all have our own views on what we like, but saying somebody else is wrong just because they liked or hated a game is beyond me.

I don't get to play as many games as **Edge** does due to financial constraints; I have to be a bit more selective. This does mean I enjoy most of the games I buy, but then I buy them because they appeal to me in the first place. Now and again a game gets universal acclaim so I'm tempted to buy it and then find it's not for me, but that's not the fault of any magazine. Games like *Tony Hawk's*, *Final Fantasy* and *GTAIII* did nothing for me, but on the other hand I really enjoyed *Star Fox Adventures*.

It's all down to personal taste. I for one will continue buying **Edge** and enjoy a good read and if along the way you recommend a game that I wouldn't normally consider then, money permitting I'll give it a go and certainly won't hold you responsible if I don't like it.
Dave Ponsford

Well quite. **Edge** is never wrong.

You might say that I'm a little late for the discussion, but the release of *GTA: Vice City* has reminded me that no real debate ever came of the two letters published some issues back concerning the Village People lookalikes wandering the streets of Liberty City. To the point: I'm a gay man and have no problem whatsoever with the moustachioed builders and camp one-liners.

I have it easy. I'm 17, I never had to fight for my rights. I have the most supportive family in the world and people basically knew that I liked boys before I even had the chance to sit down and tell them. But I am not complacent. I take gay rights extremely seriously and I am just as angry as anyone at the spineless refusal of publishers and developers to risk upsetting their precious demographics.

We all know that the inclusion of the camp pedestrians was not homophobically motivated. But I am saddened that members of a community that has always attacked frightened censors are accusing Rockstar of 'insensitivity' or "bad taste." First, Rockstar is actually subverting an industry that is terrified of any gay characters in games whatsoever. Second, why on earth can't we take a gentle ribbing? The whole ethos of *Grand Theft Auto* is to laugh at a society so obsessed with self-censorship and hierarchy imposed by conformity that the only right thing to do is to blow it to flaming shreds – take the hundreds of blonde women carrying parody Gap bags for example.

The irony is that that the authors of the letters jumped on the gag with plenty of knee-jerk distaste but probably bought this very game on the basis of effective marketing and the weight of other peoples' opinions, and that they really are willing to watch any old shit that they're given. This and the fact that **Edge** inoffensively agreed just proves Rockstar's point. We cannot bear to have our reality upset, even if our deepest desire is to wreak chaos in it. And nobody ever complained about them poking a little fun at the Hare Krishnas, did they?

I am no pushover. I have had my small share of ignorance and bigotry as well, and I kept quiet. I have no intention of suffering silently again. That does not prevent me from fulfilling a most important need to laugh at myself and my self-centred, self-reducing reality. But a word to Rockstar: perhaps a slick-dressed, glowering Velvet Mafia would not go unappreciated in the next instalment – in the same way that the chanting Krishnas were given their own gang in No 2. Just to show that there are no hard feelings, hmm?
Alexander Bubb

Edge can't help but feel that you're reading perhaps a little too much into Rockstar's subversive intentions. Insensitivity and bad taste are, **Edge** imagines, pretty much the limit of what it was aiming for, and while caricatured stereotypes might be intended to subvert, they're not always funny, and may not be interpreted as such by the legions of schoolboys attracted to the game by its guns and violence.

"Don't spend hundreds of pounds on one of the new consoles with various games, DVD handsets and the like; just pick up a Saturn for about £20 secondhand"





You know you've been playing too much when you attack every corner like Colin on your way to work. And the real reason for the Birmingham shootings, according to the 'Daily Mail', stems back to a heated dispute over a bout of *Street Fighter*

From the forum

A selection of choice cuts from Edge-Online's discussion outlet (http://forum.edge-online.com)

Subject: **You know you've been playing too much when...**
Poster: **Untogether**
You know when you've been playing too many FPSs when, when getting into a lift, if it doesn't move immediately, you jump up and down until it does. Or, you know you've playing too much *Morrowind* when you walk into a stranger's house and start rummaging through their cupboards for any items of note. Or, you know you've been playing too many Tecmo games when you find all your time is spent staring at women's breasts for no other reason than because they're there.

Come on, you lot can do better.

Poster: **James Ape**
When you start having to stop yourself from saying "lol" and "rofl" to people. My friend said it once after getting addicted to *Counter-Strike*. "yeah, lol." What a spaz.

Poster: **el Croux**
I was playing *Halo* round a mate's once, his dog was standing next to me (great dog) but it was doing something really strange and annoying at the time, so I moved the right analogue stick in an attempt to aim round and shoot it. Then when I looked away from the screen and towards the dog, I was surprised that my gun was missing. Only looking back at the screen made me realise that the gun is hardly gonna leave the screen now is it?

Poster: **Mr Monkey**
After a marathon session of *GoldenEye* a friend and I left the house. For ages I could see a crosshair moving around my vision, going for the headshots. Also, thinking I can actually do all the fighting moves I have learned in *Shenmue*.

Poster: **boomkat_boy**
Subconsciously checking which parked cars are best for a *GTAIII*-style carjacking. Or looking at tall buildings to evaluate their usefulness as a place to shoot a sniper rifle from.

Poster: **4stroke**
When you're having a tedious conversation you keep subconsciously pressing X to 'skip the cut-scene'. Or when you're in the passenger seat of a car and say stuff like "caution, hard left – don't cut."

Poster: **ahrha**
... you put the controller down, realise it's nearly 7am, then go to read the **Edge** forum?

Subject: **'Daily Mail' vs Videogames: round 11**
Poster: **Chocobo-rob**
Perhaps you have noticed that gang warfare has affected the streets of Birmingham. Perhaps you are wondering what the root cause could be. Wonder no longer, for those impartial reporters at the 'Daily Mail' have found the answer. In an article entitled 'Blood Feud that Started with a Computer Game' the 'Mail' explains that the two gangs came into being because two kids played *Street Fighter* once, which ended with one winner and one loser as is usually the case with fighting games. Said winner and loser argued over the result, progressed to a fist-fight and eventually organised gangs to kill each other... and the girls who, very tragically, were in the wrong place at the wrong time.

So there you have it. No computer games = no crime whatsoever.

Poster: **Sorolan**
What I don't understand is how an argument can erupt over who won. In *Street Fighter* you either win or lose, there is nothing else.

Poster: **Rodders**
Did you know that, worldwide, there were 43 journalists convicted of being paedophiles last year? We should lock *them* up and throw away the key.

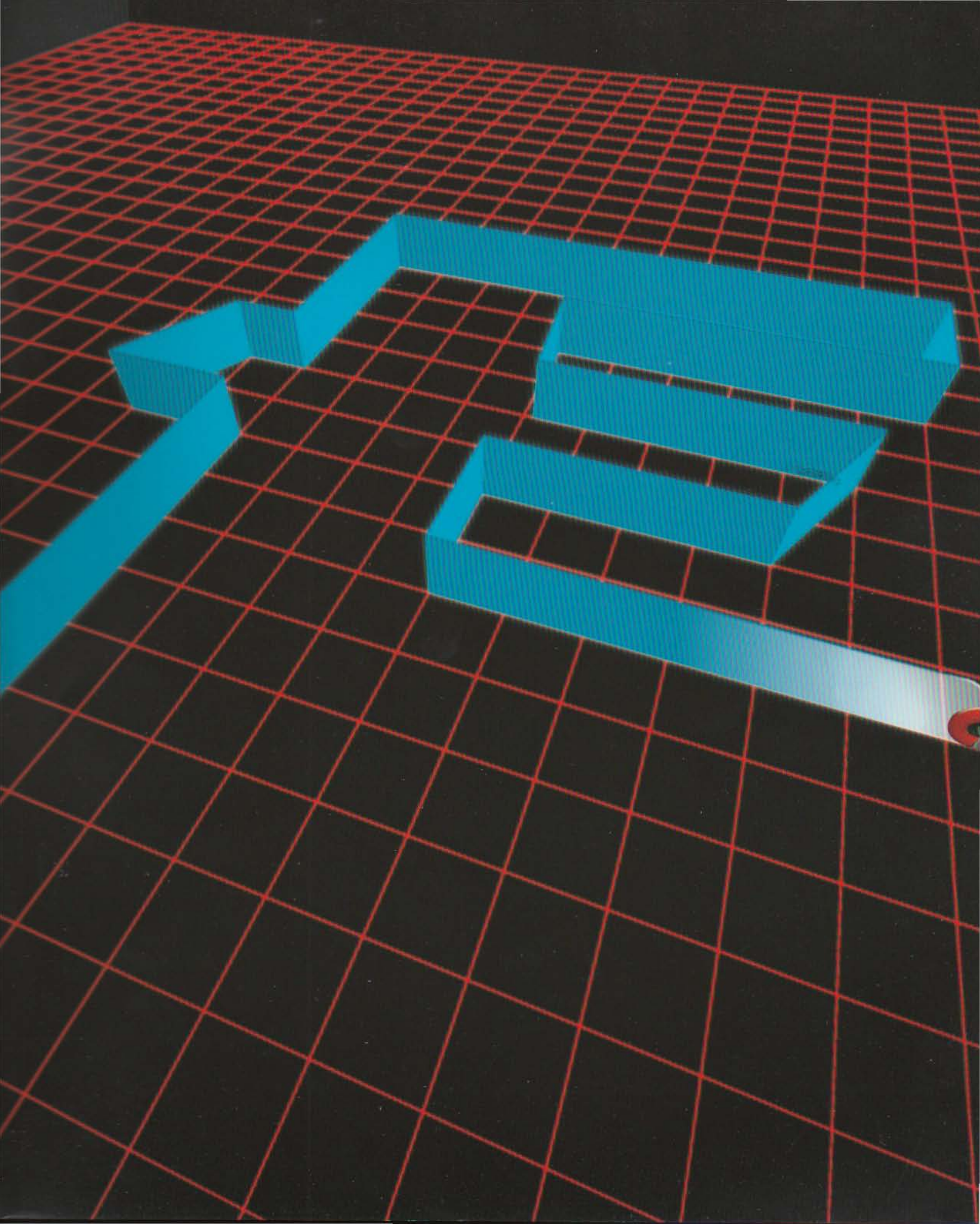
Subject: **Ouch! Most painful looking bit in a game**
Poster: **Des**
Just been playing *Eternal Darkness* with Dr Edwin Lindsey. When you get crushed by the stones slamming together it really makes you cringe. I suppose it's only a combination of sound and animation but it's very effective. After reading the review of *Rocky* I get the impression that it conveys a similar feeling. Any other examples?

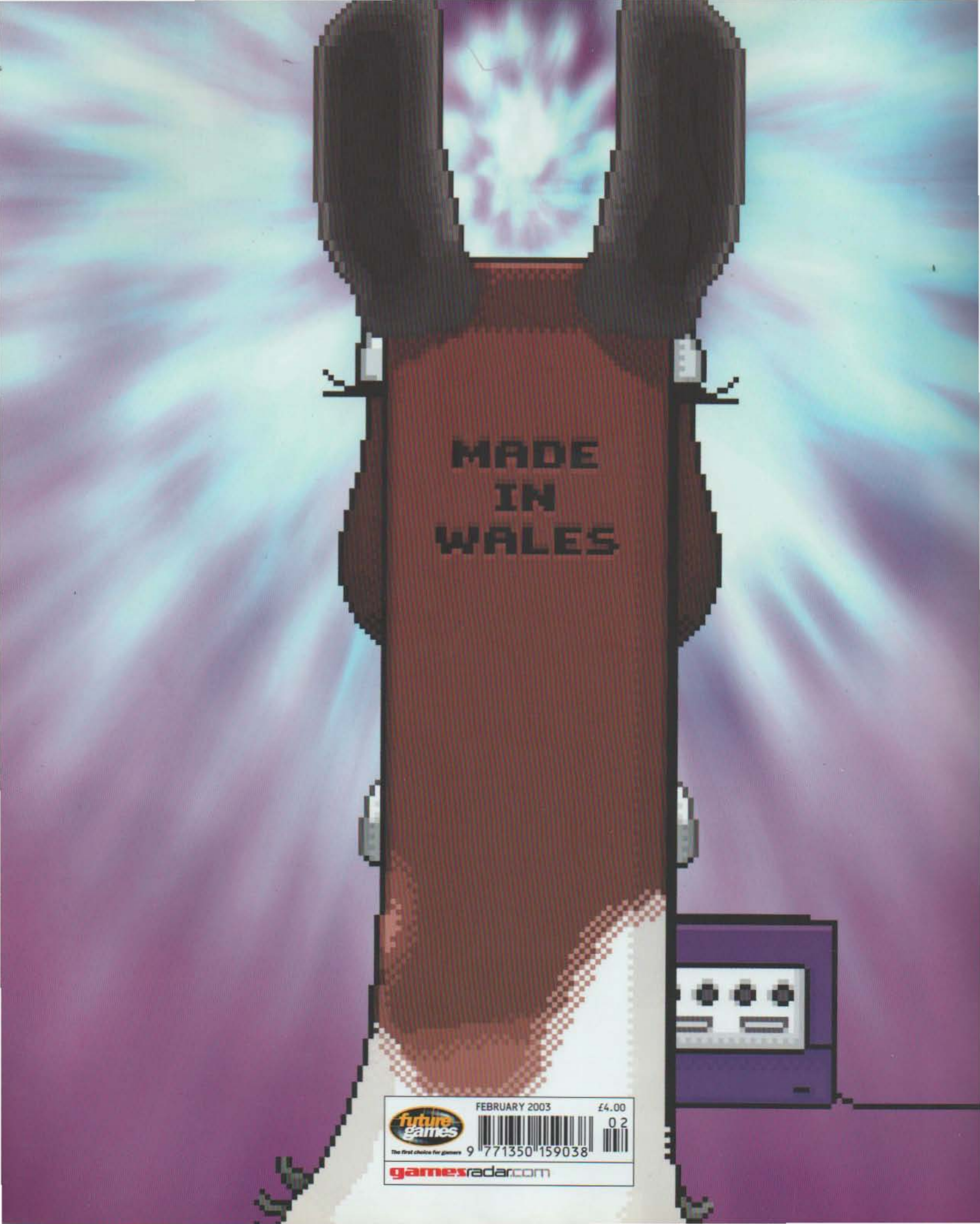
Poster: **Jpickford**
Tony Hawk's when he hits his head on the concrete and leaves a smear of blood. So unexpected in a game like that – horrible.

Poster: **napole0n**
Dropping from a great height into some spikes in the first *Tomb Raider*. Or dropping from a great height onto solid concrete. The death-animation and cracking-bone sound were just horrible. Could never see that without getting a shiver down my spine.

"In an article entitled 'Blood Feud that Started with a Computer Game' the 'Daily Mail' explains that the two gangs came into being because two kids played Street Fighter once"

Next month




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